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THE LIFE OF
MÈRE ST. JOSEPH



Mère St. Joseph.

THE LIFE OF MÈRE ST. JOSEPH

(MARIE LOUISE FRANÇOISE BLIN DE BOURDON)

CO-FOUNDRESS AND SECOND SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE INSTITUTE
OF SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME OF NAMUR

BY

A MEMBER OF THE SAME INSTITUTE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

365



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IN obedience to the Decree of Pope Urban VIII the writer protests that all that is written in this "Life" has no other force or credit than such as is grounded on human authority. Hence no expression or statement is intended to assume the approbation or anticipate the decision of the Church.

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NOTE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

THE present rendering of the Life of Mère St. Joseph Blin de Bourdon, co-foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame, is based entirely on the French edition published in 1920 by Monsieur L. Téchy-Tomme, Belgium.

To the author of that edition is due all the credit of original and painstaking research; the writer of the English version has merely entered into the fruit of her labours, and has aimed at producing a work less fully documented perhaps, though no less authentic, and at presenting the subject-matter of the original in a form more suitable to the mentality of the English reader than a verbatim translation would have been.

For the original documents quoted, or alluded to in the course of the narrative, the reader is referred to the French edition, where these are collected in an Appendix. In view of their accessibility, it has not been considered necessary to reprint them here.

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THE LIFE OF MÈRE ST. JOSEPH

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

“ I WILL go there, because I want to.” The speaker was a high-spirited little girl of four, the daughter of one of the noblest and most ancient families of Picardy, who lived with her grandparents, the Baron and Baroness de Fouquesolles, in the château of Gézaincourt.

“ There ” was a certain terrace in the grounds of the château where the child had been forbidden to go lest she should come to some mishap. Possibly the very fact that it was “ out of bounds ” was sufficient to lend an adventitious charm to the spot ; more probably the attempt to thwart her imperious will was the cause of the passionate outburst. Six times in succession the wilful little maiden persisted in returning to the terrace, and six times her patient and judicially minded grandmother calmly exacted the punishment which had been threatened in case of delinquency.

Frances was the youngest of the three children of the Viscount Blin de Bourdon and of his wife Marie Louise Claudine de Fouquesolles. She was born at the home of her maternal grandparents on the 8th of March, 1756, and, at her baptism on the 9th, the feast of St. Frances of Rome, received the names of Marie Louise Françoise.

The day of her baptism was celebrated as a public holiday by the tenantry of the little village, between whom and the owners of the domain the happiest relations had existed ever since the time when, in the seventeenth century, Gézaincourt came into the hands of the de Fouquesolles. The joys and sorrows of the great house were the joys and sorrows of the humble cottages that clustered round the little church or dotted the side of the wooded chalk downs which sheltered the fertile valley from the inroads of modern civilisation.

When, some time after the birth of Frances, Madame Blin de Bourdon prepared to return home, the old Baroness de Fouquesolles could not bring herself to part with the child who had first seen the light under her roof, and Frances remained in the care of her grandparents.

Gradually, as a result of this arrangement, the life of the château came to revolve round a new centre. The Baron and Baroness felt their youth renewed as the corridors of the old house re-echoed the pattering footsteps and merry laughter of their daughter's child. They nominated her heiress to their estate, of which, according to the custom of the time, she assumed the title, and she was known thenceforward as Mlle. de Gézaincourt.

Brought up as the only child of devoted grandparents, charming, lovable and wilful, Frances would naturally run some danger of developing into a spoilt child. But the anecdotes which remain to us of these early days show that Mme. de Fouquesolles joined to a realisation of her high responsibility the firmness, the sense of proportion, the tact and patience, to say nothing of the ingenuity, which are among the requisites of a perfect educator.

The child inherited her grandmother's love of the

open air, and delighted to follow her about the avenues of the park and to learn from her to appreciate the beauties of Nature.

One day, however, when the rain kept her prisoner in the house, Frances sought and discovered an outlet for her pent-up energy by improvising a gymnasium in the drawing-room. Her governess, Mlle. Ursule, attracted by the unwonted noise, opened the door to find the child leaping from chair to chair. Her remonstrances were unavailing; in spite of all her protests the gymnastic exhibition proceeded, and Mme. de Fouquesolles was obliged to intervene. There was a certain landing on the staircase which was regarded as a place of punishment for acts of insubordination.

"My child," said the stately Baroness, "to teach you how to obey I am going to send you to stand on the landing."

"But, Grandmamma," threatened the child, knowing the old lady's objection to a noise, "if you send me up there, I shall scream as loud as I can."

"Go up, my child," was the unrelenting answer.

Frances went up a few steps and proceeded to carry out her threat. No one, however, paid any attention.

"Grandmamma," she called out, "don't you hear me screaming? And I shall scream louder still."

To this Mme. de Fouquesolles merely replied in the chilliest of tones, "Go right up to the top."

Step by step the culprit mounted, but at each step "I shan't stay there," she reiterated, "I shall scream." Arrived at the top she was as good as her word. The house resounded with her screams and cries till her grandmother could bear it no longer. She realised, moreover, that to goad the child, now beside herself with anger, into further open defiance was to risk not only present defeat, but permanent loss of authority. The emotional pitch of the situation was

too high. Wisely, Mme. de Fouquesolles lowered it by a change of tactics.

She sent Mlle. Ursule to try to bring the child to reason.

Frances came down. It was a critical moment. No symptom of penitence appeared in her demeanour; in a triumphant tone, "You see, Grandmamma," she said, "I did scream."

Gently the Baroness drew the child to her knee and reminded her of the child Jesus, obedient in all things to His parents at Nazareth. The little one burst into tears, and throwing herself into her grandmother's arms she said: "Don't be sad any more, Grandmamma; I do mean to please little Jesus." And thereupon she went upstairs again to the landing of her own accord, and there remained in silence for half an hour to expiate her fault.

There was a Carmelite convent at Gézaincourt, and occasionally Frances was taken there to visit the nuns. One day, to amuse her, they put her in the "turn," and left her there for some minutes. Great as was the attraction she was to show in later years for the Carmelites, at this stage a little seclusion was more than enough. Nor were the sisters left in any doubt upon the subject, for the little prisoner began to stamp and scream for her release. "Is God pleased," she demanded, "when people torment little children? For your penance," she continued, "(Grandmamma always gives me a penance when I'm naughty) you shall keep me here three days. I shall enjoy myself, and I shall torment you too."

The sentence was commuted, no doubt, but the Carmelites always had a warm welcome for the spirited, lovable little girl.

Her very loveliness, of course, was not without its dangers. Not all of those who visited the Château de

Gézaincourt were gifted with Mme. de Fouquesolles' discretion. Many years later, when Frances was a venerable nun of over eighty, and was known as Mère St. Joseph, she used to tell her religious daughters the story of one visitor who remarked in her hearing: "What a charming child! And what a gift of witty repartee!" "This speech," she would say, "gave me great satisfaction, but my grandmother had heard it too, and when we were alone she reminded me that people do not really admire forwardness and love of notice. 'Pride,' she said, 'and empty chatter destroy the best qualities both of heart and head.'"

Dealing with a temperament so impulsive and so determined, it would have been easy for Mme. de Fouquesolles and Mlle. Ursule to have slipped into a policy of opportunism and to have been content to secure present peace at the cost of character training, but they seem never to have lost patience in inculcating right principles and in appealing to lofty motives, and the noble nature of the child responded to their training.

One day, when Frances, then about five years old, was playing among the flower-beds she was stung by a wasp, and cried out with pain. Mlle. Ursule exhorted her to bear the pain in expiation for her sins. "I've not committed any sins yet," said the victim, drying her eyes; "Grandmamma told me so, but I'll stop crying for the love of the Infant Jesus."

"I was for a long time a difficult child," confesses Mère St. Joseph. "My self-will used to rebel against the orders I received, and occasionally I played tricks on my grandmother, kind as she was to me. I had a pretty pair of shoes with rosettes of which I was very fond and which were then very fashionable. One day in a mischievous mood I put these shoes on and slipped out to paddle to my heart's content in the mud by the

edge of the pond ; then, proud of my escapade, I came back to show my slippers all covered with mud. Grandmamma scolded and I wept. But my fit of contrition did not last very long. I argued with myself: 'Why should I be distressed? I've not committed a sin. Dirtying one's shoes isn't soiling one's soul.' And it did not occur to me that I had given trouble to my good grandmother, who took such pains to make me happy."

The self-exoneration of the child and the self-reproach of the woman alike bear witness to the solidity of Mme. de Fouquesolles' training.

The innocence of Frances was evident to those who prepared her for her first confession. She seems to have found her confessor more indulgent than her grandmother, for when he asked her to say two "Our Fathers" for her penance, she replied: "I shall be happy to submit often to what you call a penance."

In her childish inexperience she had yet to learn how wide a gulf human weakness interposes between purpose and achievement. "What can people say," she asked ingenuously, "when they go to confession the second time?" And certainly her first confession marked a definite stage in her spiritual development; for from that time she was never known to give way to a fit of obstinate disobedience. Her generous and ardent soul had felt the touch of grace and thenceforth was definitely set towards goodness.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL AND HOME

WITH the exception of occasional short visits to her father's house at Amiens or his country estate at Bourdon, Frances spent the first six years of her childhood at Gézaincourt.

Life there was quiet enough during the winter, but in the summer-time the owners of the surrounding seats came to their country houses to pass the season and visitors were numerous. The bright and winsome little Frances soon began to attract more attention and receive more compliments from these people than her grandmother thought advisable. It was therefore decided that the child should be put to school.

At that time there was at Doullens an Abbey of Benedictine nuns. It was an ancient foundation, the earliest extant document relating to it being a charter of confirmation bearing date 1138. Here the daughters of many of the noblest families of France were sent to be educated, for St. Michel was the St. Cyr of Picardy.

The community itself counted some distinguished names, and the nomination of the Abbess was in the hands of the King of France.

It may be readily understood that such a regulation had not on every occasion been to the advantage of religious discipline; there had been royal appointments which had been dictated by political intrigue, and which had led to temporary relaxations of fervour

in the community. The present Abbess, however, was a holy as well as a distinguished woman, under whose rule monastic regularity was duly observed, and the nuns divided their time between the chanting of Divine Office and the education of young girls of rank.

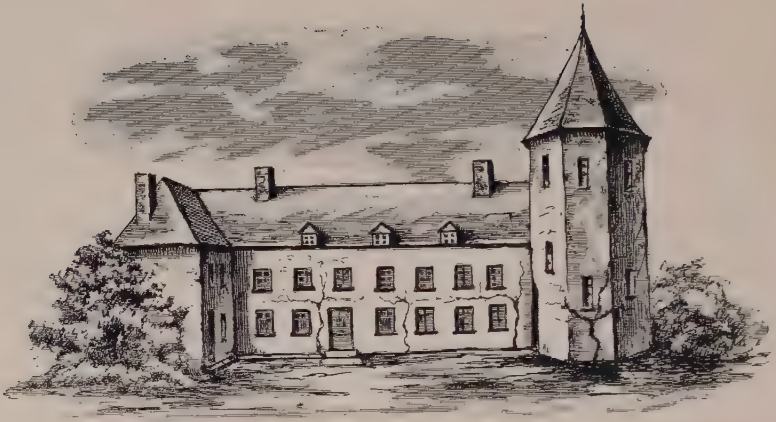
To this convent Frances was sent in 1762, and for the next six years she passed the summer there and returned in the autumn to spend the winter months at Gézaincourt.

As at Port Royal and other institutions of the same class, the life was somewhat rigid and austere. The daily round was unvaried save by an occasional day of festivity, the more appreciated by its very rarity. Methods of discipline were reasonable, however, and the nuns devoted themselves to the careful study of character and the formation of will and judgment. The instruction given was solid and thorough, though the curriculum was less extended than in the convent schools of to-day.

Alluding in later years to her stay with the Benedictines, Mère St. Joseph used to say that it seemed as though the special mission of the nuns was to train women capable of facing the dire troubles which the Revolution was so soon to bring upon France.

At St. Michel too Frances gained a deeper knowledge of the inner workings of religious life, which had only been known to her before through her short visits to the Carmel of Amiens. Here she was not merely a visitor, she was an inmate of the monastery, living in hourly contact with the nuns, sharing to some extent their life and imbibing the spirit of the Benedictine Pax.

Nor did she, as one might have expected, find the discipline of school irksome by contrast with the freedom she had enjoyed, and still intermittently enjoyed, at Gézaincourt; on the contrary, she seems



Château de Gézaincourt, where Frances was born.



Château de Gézaincourt, rebuilt 1839.

to have been thoroughly happy at St. Michel, and her references to it always sound a note of joy and gratitude.

On their side the nuns soon formed a high opinion of their pupil in regard both to her intellectual capacity and the rich potentialities of her nature. Inheriting the lofty traditions of the Blins, whose integrity had already in the Middle Ages given rise to the local proverb, "*Bon comme un Blin*," she was incapable of falsehood or subterfuge, and if she had been guilty of a breach of school discipline, so far was she from seeking to evade the consequences of her misdemeanour that she would set her conscience at rest by an open avowal. It is clear that, while inculcating a high sense of responsibility, her educators had not failed to inspire their little charge with trust in their own judgments, for the child who fears an unjust or disproportionate sentence is scarcely likely to take the initiative in appearing before a tribunal.

During her absence, in spite of the influx of visitors, a sense of loneliness and desolation descended like a cloud upon the manor of Gézaincourt, and her grandparents sought compensation in visits to St. Michel on their own part, or by sending for Frances to spend an occasional day at home during the term of her exile, while no sooner did the first chilly blasts of autumn drive the city-lovers back to their drawing-rooms in town than the Baroness hastened to recall her little one to Gézaincourt.

A deep solicitude for the welfare of their dependents was traditional among the de Fouquesolles. While the Baron took a personal interest in providing them with work and securing for them an honourable means of livelihood, the Baroness visited them in their homes and endeared herself to them by the solicitude with which she ministered to their needs. When

Frances was at home she accompanied her grandmother and frequently became the instrument of her delicate and unobtrusive charity, so that even at this early age the child learned to taste the pleasure of giving, and to realise the value of personal service.

Six years passed thus in happy alternation between convent and home. Of incidents of her school life Frances has left no record, we know only that the chronicles of the heroines of Picardy, which she read assiduously, inspired her with noble ambitions and that she began to embody these in an "autobiography" which she afterwards destroyed, but which would have been an enlightening document for her biographer as revealing the aspirations of her soul. She was confirmed, probably at the age of eight, by Mgr. de la Motte, at his pastoral visitation, and in 1767 at the age of eleven she made her first Communion.

One other incident of these years gave a bent to the child's spiritual life. In 1765 the Queen, Marie Leckzinska, had expressed to the Bishops assembled at Paris her desire for the solemn celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart. As a result, Mgr. de la Motte, by a mandate dated 7th October, 1767, prescribed the celebration of the feast throughout the diocese of Amiens on the Sunday after the octave of Corpus Christi.

The Abbess of St. Michel secured the dedication of an altar to the Sacred Heart in the church of the abbey, and established there a confraternity richly indulgenced by Pope Clement XIII. The occasion was celebrated with pomp and splendour, and in later days Frances used to say that it was at St. Michel that she learnt the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the spirit of reparation.

In 1768 Frances was transferred to the convent of the Ursulines at Amiens. The spirit of religious

fervour which animated these nuns, no less than their earnestness and success as educators, led many of the best families in France to entrust their daughters to them.

At Amiens, as at Doullens, Frances distinguished herself both intellectually and morally, and soon acquired an influence over her companions which foreshadowed the qualities of leadership afterwards characteristic of the religious superior.

Here she met again one of the friends of her childhood, Mlle. Jeanne de Croquoison. The two girls had much in common: they had been brought up with the same simple tastes, they both cherished the same high ideals and were both attracted to the religious life. Both at this stage desired to give themselves to God as Carmelites; when, in 1772, Mlle. de Croquoison was married to the Marquis de Franssu their ways seemed to diverge. Only for a time, however, for after the death of her husband in 1800, Mme. de Franssu devoted the remainder of her life to the interests of Christian education, founding for this purpose an institute under the title of *Religieuses de la Nativité de Notre Seigneur*.

After a stay of two or three years with the Ursulines, Mlle. de Gézaincourt returned to her grandparents. Spending her winters at Amiens and her summers at Gézaincourt, she put into practice, rather, we should say, she continued the practice of those acts of unselfishness and of consideration for others in which she had been schooled. The motto she had adopted, and which she wrote at the head of her rule of life, was "To find my happiness in procuring the happiness of others," and in her case it was not merely a high-sounding ideal but a practical rule of conduct. She became the inseparable companion of her grandmother, continuing under her direction the works of bene-

volence and charity which were traditional at Gézaincourt, and in deference to her mother's wishes she cultivated the arts and accomplishments which were regarded as necessary for a young lady of her rank.

In these peaceful and interesting pursuits the days sped happily away and brought round her nineteenth birthday. Her parents, the Viscount and Viscountess Blin, decided that Frances should come out in the ensuing winter. Accordingly, after the usual family reunion at Gézaincourt in the summer of 1775, instead of returning to Amiens, Frances took a tender leave of her grandparents and went home with her father and mother to Bourdon.

CHAPTER III

FRANCES AND THE WORLD

THE village of Bourdon is situated to the north of the railway from Amiens to Abbeville; in one direction it extends along the marshy banks of the Somme, in the other it mounts a range of hills and overlooks the historic valley whose flourishing towns have often been an apple of discord between France and Holland.

At the end of the eighteenth century Bourdon counted but 370 inhabitants, to-day the number has increased to over 600, who, however, still exhibit the simplicity and love of a laborious life which characterised their predecessors. Those of the peasantry who are not employed in agriculture are engaged in working at the peat-cutting, the establishment of which industry has brought a certain prosperity to the district.

The estate came into possession of the family of Blin in 1638 by the marriage of Antoine Blin with Hélène de Bertin. The title of Viscount was bestowed on their son Claude de Blin de Bourdon, great-grandfather of Frances, by Louis XIV as a reward for his military achievements, and was confirmed in 1817 by letters patent of Louis XVIII.

The spacious and elegant manor house which now became the home of Frances had been built by her parents in the year of their marriage, and the part of

it which is still standing is, thanks to the generosity of its owners, now used as a hospice for the old men of the countryside.

It may be imagined with what joy M. and Mme. Blin welcomed the child of whose sunny presence they had so long deprived themselves. And Frances too must have found a new and keen delight in the companionship of her brother and sister, whom hitherto she had scarcely seen. The former, Viscount Louis Marie César, had joined the army at the age of eighteen, that is, some four years before Frances came home. He found a military career particularly congenial to his high-spirited and impetuous temperament, but he was fond of home, and every leave from camp or barrack life brought him back to Bourdon for a day or even for a few hours. As a result of this companionship a tender and lifelong intimacy sprang up between him and Frances. During these years they shared their ambitions, their projects and even their resources, which they pooled for their acts of charity.

Neither the lapse of time, nor even the thorny question of self-interest, so frequent a solvent of family affection, had power to weaken the bonds which henceforth united Frances with her sister and brother. This fact was evidenced long years after when Mère St. Joseph announced her intention of leaving her fortune to the Institute of which she had become co-foundress. "I have long been aware," writes her nephew, replying to her letter, "of the disposal you intended to make of your property; my uncle had informed me of it . . . but this circumstance can have no possible effect on the natural attachment I feel for the sister of a mother whose memory is so dear to me. You would have been doing an injustice to your nephews if you had thought them

likely to resent your action ; everyone has the right to dispose of what is his own. You are devoting what is yours, your watchings, your cares and your whole self, to preparing hearts for the love of our Lord and the practice of virtue ; what more noble use could you make of it? . . . As for me, my dearest aunt, send me your blessing and give me a little share in your prayers and I shall consider myself the inheritor of the richest legacy in the world."

The kindly interest, moreover, of the family of Blin de Bourdon has never ceased to follow the work to which Frances consecrated her fortune and her life, and every notable event in the history of the Institute of Notre Dame evokes a congratulatory letter from their descendants.

It was not only in the home circle that the gifts of Frances were applauded. Her father, Viscount Blin, added to distinction of rank and the tradition of an honourable past the charm of a remarkable and attractive personality, and the family had a large circle of friends among the owners of the neighbouring seats. In their frequent social gatherings Frances was always a welcome guest. She was an excellent conversationalist, and the ready wit which had characterised her as a child, now bridled by self-discipline, had lost its causticity but none of its brilliance. She thoroughly appreciated the graciousness which was added to social intercourse by the severe code of breeding of the eighteenth century ; she possessed a beautiful voice, and, in short, in a century and a society which exacted the highest products of culture from its members, Frances shone with a special radiance where all were bright.

Precisely because these gifts were not superficial, but were based on the deep foundations of religious

principle, there was no danger that, with the world at her feet, she should become worldly ; she was indeed all the more gay, all the more engaging in the drawing-room for the hours that were lovingly spent in the little church of Bourdon.

That the world should try to capture her was of course inevitable. The duties of her father's position brought him into relation with the highest dignitaries of France, and during the season Frances attended the drawing-rooms of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, whose popularity was then at its height. Few could have foreseen how soon these social assemblies at Versailles, marvelled at then for their splendour, were to be criticised for their extravagance, nor how soon the royal lilies of France would be trampled upon by those very people who now greeted every public appearance of the young King and Queen with such perfervid exhibitions of loyalty.

Of this portion of her life, because it savoured of worldly magnificence, Mère St. Joseph could never be beguiled into speaking, except in so far perhaps as to refer with sympathy and admiration to Madame Elizabeth, who has been looked upon as the most touching victim of the Revolution. Mlle. de Gézaincourt had met her several times and had had, especially at Marly, a glimpse of the tenderness and piety of the Princess. Between these two souls there existed a mutual understanding and kinship of spirit which is as real as it is intangible, and Frances might have been admitted amongst the intimate friends of the King's sister had she so wished. But, says her nephew, "she had the good judgment to appreciate at its just worth the success which might have been hers," and she despised the passing glory of this world for the sake of the lasting glory to come.

Was it without a struggle that this girl in the early twenties sacrificed her love of pleasure to a judgment so mature and so sane? Intense home affections would of course weigh in the balance, but the decision, which was evidently a personal one, argues a keenness of spiritual vision such as characterises those who habitually judge the things of this world by the standard of Faith. Whatever the circumstances of her choice, we find that Frances preferred her home duties and the light of her own fireside to the dazzling life of the Court, the only effect of her intercourse with which was to inspire her with a great devotion to the practice of prayer for those upon whom devolves the grave and perilous responsibility of rule.

In June 1781 her brother left the army and married Mlle. Elizabeth Pingré de Fieffes, daughter of an ancient family of Picardy, and in the following December the elder sister, Marie Louise Aimée, married M. Gaspard Félix. The two couples established themselves at Amiens, the young Viscount buying the mansion in the rue des Augustins which was later to play an important part in the history of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

In consequence of these two marriages the year 1781 was a succession of family parties and festivities; it was too a year of complete social success for Frances. In her own turn she was sought after, admired, flattered, and naturally the thoughts of all her friends turned towards the prospect of a brilliant marriage for her.

But her heart was already won, and neither the sight of her brother's or her sister's happiness, nor the entreaties of her parents, who would have welcomed for her an alliance with one or other of the noblest names of France, could prevail over her

steadfastness of will. She had heard the call of Christ, and though, in the designs of Providence, long years were to elapse before she was free to respond, her ears were henceforth deaf to the siren voices of the world.

CHAPTER IV

“ THE ANGEL OF THE CHÂTEAU ”

BEAUTIFUL, wealthy, gifted, lovable, it would seem as though the happiness of Frances must be complete. And yet, throughout the sunny years at Bourdon, she bore a cross than which almost any other would have been lighter. Her father, tainted with the errors of Voltairianism, had ceased to practise the duties of his religion. Years of absence from the services of the little church had transformed what was at first a subject of wonder into an accepted fact for the villagers of Bourdon, but to Frances the aberration was a daily heart-break and her father's return to the Church the object of her daily prayer.

To one who is pleading for the conversion of a loved but straying soul, it must often seem that God is unheeding when it is only man that is recalcitrant, and the perseverance of Frances was to be tried by long delay. In the end the power of grace prevailed, but not until much tribulation had brought the wanderer in humility to the feet of Christ.

In the summer of 1783 an accident happened to the carriage in which Mme. Blin de Bourdon was returning from a visit to one of her children. The injuries she sustained were severe and incurable, though ten painful months were to intervene between the accident and its fatal result. During this period Frances proved herself not only a devoted nurse to

her suffering mother, but a source of cheerfulness and strength to her father.

On a page in a notebook on which Mère St. Joseph recorded the memorable dates of her life we find the following laconic entry: "1783. Semi-conversion, light imperfect." We are left to conjecture its significance; such records were never intended for the illumination of biographers. The entry evidently marks a signpost in the interior life, some definite grace, which may have been connected with her mother's illness, or possibly with Frances' refusal of a brilliant marriage which had been proposed for her shortly before. Apart from this we have no evidence from her own pen by which to judge of the development of spiritual life in this phase of her early womanhood, nor have we any record of the intimate intercourse which must have existed between the saintly mother and her daughter during these long months of suffering.

On February 24, 1784, when the life of Mme. Blin de Bourdon was hanging in the balance, came the news from Gézaincourt of the sudden death of the Baron de Fouquesolles, and it fell to the lot of Frances to endeavour from a distance to console her widowed grandmother. Six weeks later, on the 2nd of April, her mother died a holy and consoling death. The double cross called forth all the latent strength of her character; deprived of the mother she so tenderly loved, she was not found wanting when others turned to her for consolation and support.

The aged Baroness, bereft by so sudden a blow of her lifelong companion, found the loneliness of Gézaincourt unbearable, and wrote to Bourdon pleading for the return of "the little one," as she still called her loved grand-daughter. Neither Monsieur Blin nor Frances could turn a deaf ear to her appeal, and

the latter went back to Gézaincourt to be the support of the last years of Mme. de Fouquesolles, while her place at Bourdon was taken by her sister, Mme. Félix, who came with her husband and family to reside at the château.

So after nine years of absence Mlle. de Gézaincourt returned to the home of her youth. Her character had been developed by the years at school and by those still more potent if less ostensibly formative years at Bourdon which had brought her into contact with the deeper issues of life and death. For ten years more she was to remain at Gézaincourt, years which were precious as developing in her the capacities for government which her after life called for in such large measure.

The administration of the household and of the vast estates of her grandmother was placed in her hands; the dark days of the Revolution were to prove with what justice and what wisdom she carried out her task. The principles of true Christian charity had ever been the basis of the relations between the masters of Gézaincourt and their tenantry, and Frances had a noble tradition to guide her. The great secret of her personal success was that without any compromise of dignity she knew how to condescend to the simplicity of her dependents, and she loved them and laboured for their interests instead of exploiting them for her own.

In all their troubles they had recourse to their "bonne demoiselle," attributing to her ministrations something of a supernatural efficacy and calling her "the angel of the château." Accompanied by her former governess, Dame Ursule, now retained as her chaperon, she visited the homes of the poor and administered in person the remedies she had personally prepared.

An old peasant woman of eighty used to recall many a story of the charitable deeds which filled the daily life of Frances at this period. When only three years old this woman, Flora Delhomel, had fallen and plunged her arm into a pan of boiling water. Her mother caught her up and made straight for the "bonne demoiselle," satisfied that she would apply an effective remedy. Frances kept the child at the château, and under her skilful treatment the little one made such progress that in a few days she was sufficiently recovered to go home. So grateful were the patients whom she had relieved in cases of whitlow, that the report of her success brought to her people from all the surrounding villages who were afflicted with this painful complaint. In the part of the grounds known as "Mademoiselle's garden," a collection of medicinal herbs grew side by side with the flowers, and these were distributed to her protégés according to their needs.

A pilgrim visiting Gézaincourt at the close of the last century notes that great changes had then taken place in the aspect of the property. The château had been demolished and replaced in 1839 by a modern construction; the chapel had been rebuilt and the grounds laid out afresh. All that remained unchanged was a small portion of the pond beside which Frances used to play. Of the ancient village church where Mlle. de Gézaincourt used to pray, the church built by her family and kept up at their expense, there remained only the sanctuary and the little chapel reserved for the lords of the manor. The estate, strange to say, although situated so close to the battle-fields of the Somme, did not suffer during the recent war, and is now in possession of the family de Vézian.

But if the aspect of the place has changed with the changing years, the memory of the charity of the Blins

is still a living tradition. The great-great-nephew of Mère St. Joseph, deputy of the extreme right, is regularly returned without opposition as the representative of the district in the French *Chambre des Députés*, and the name of Mlle. Françoise is still mentioned by the inhabitants of the little village with respect and devotion.

Busily occupied with her duties to her own family circle and to her tenantry, Frances found little time for worldly entertainments, and interchanged visits only with her relatives and a few intimate friends such as Mme. de Franssu, already mentioned, and the Countess Baudouin, whose father held the office of Secretary of State to Louis XVI. To these she was united by community of interests and of occupations, and together she and they devised and executed innumerable charitable projects.

If Frances mixed but little with the great world, however, this was not because she chose to shut herself up in any kind of morose seclusion. Her life was too full and her interests too diverse to permit of self-occupation or gloomy brooding. The keen spirit of Faith which was characteristic of her, manifested itself in her strong and practical devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Every morning she heard Mass, and frequently during the week she received Holy Communion. Her parish priest gave testimony to the long hours she spent in private prayer before the altar, in addition to attendance at the public services. Deft in the use of her needle, and highly artistic, she embroidered vestments, undertook the care of the altar linen, and regarded it as her privilege to prepare the altar for Mass and to adorn it with flowers from her own garden. When the feast of Corpus Christi drew near, it was Frances who organised the village procession, training the children and young girls to

take part in it with grace and decorum, and exercising them in the singing of hymns. The altar of repose which was always erected at the château was her personal charge, and she was ever ready to lend anything that was necessary for the decoration of the altars in the village street.

The old custom of gathering the entire family together at Gézaincourt to pass the summer was still maintained, and gave Frances innumerable opportunities for putting in practice the motto she had chosen for her guiding principle. Brought up as she had been entirely with her elders, and naturally more at home in their society, she yet devoted herself cheerfully to amusing her little nieces and nephews ; longing in the secrecy of her heart for the solitude of Carmel, she entertained with her habitual graciousness the guests who visited the château or came to enjoy the attractions of the magnificent tennis court constructed on one of the vast lawns of the park ; eager to follow the call of God, she yet schooled herself to await His moment with patience.

CHAPTER V

THE REVOLUTION OF 1789

MEANWHILE, angry clouds were gathering on the political horizon, and the pernicious doctrines of the schools of Voltaire and Rousseau combined with the growing exactions of the ruling classes to produce the Revolution of 1789.

The happy relations which, as we have seen, existed between landlords and tenantry at Bourdon and at Gézaincourt averted from the Blins for some time the blows which fell thick and fast around them. The appalling occurrences which were announced from the capital, the taking of the Bastille, the King's unsuccessful attempt at flight and the imprisonment of the Royal family came to them as sinister warnings. Amiens, where the brother of Mlle. de Gézaincourt had resided since his marriage, was also relatively calm. Dumont, governor of the province of Picardy, hoped, it is said, to find a refuge in it when his revolutionary commission should have expired, and, in consequence, while, there as elsewhere, liberty was largely sacrificed, there was little actual bloodshed. Throughout the horrors of the Revolution, no more than three executions are reported to have taken place there.

Soon, however, the Jacobins cast a covetous eye upon the property of the "Citizen Blin-Bourdon," father of Frances, in the department of the Pas-de-Calais. Early in 1793 his name was entered in the

list of *émigrés* and his possessions exposed to public auction, while, owing to the sentence of death which had been pronounced against the deserters of their country, his life was in actual danger. The heavy fines imposed on every pretext, added to the fact that, for more than a year, the Viscount had received nothing of the produce of his estates, reduced him to actual want, and with him those who had been accustomed to profit by his charity. Representations were made, but in vain, to the most influential persons of the Pas-de-Calais, while the certificates of residence, obtained with difficulty from the communes of Bourdon and Flixécourt, did not avail to secure any redress.

At last, on September 27 of the second year of the Republic, Viscount Louis Marie César made a last effort on behalf of his father, and wrote from Amiens a courageous letter to the Republican authorities. Representing that, far from being of the number of the *émigrés*, his father, now an old man of eighty-eight, had not even absented himself from his estate for the last twelve years, he protested against the threatened confiscation and represented the state of need to which the whole family was reduced.

The answer to his spirited letter was what one would expect from the type of men to whom it was addressed. The aged Viscount, Pierre Louis Blin de Bourdon, was dragged away to languish for long months in the prison of Amiens, a victim to indignities of every kind. His son also paid for his bold exposure of injustice. On December 17, 1793, he was imprisoned at Amiens with one devoted serving-man, under an accusation of having been an accomplice of his sister-in-law, Mme. de Herte, arrested on a charge of sending money to her husband, one of the *émigrés*. On the 15th of March, by an interesting caprice of what

passed for law, his wife and son, the latter but twelve years of age, who were regarded as having incurred the same guilt, were incarcerated with him in the Convent of Providence, transformed into a prison.

Meanwhile the unhappy M. de Herte, who had returned to France, fell into the hands of his enemies and was tried and summarily executed at Rouen. His wife and his brother-in-law, the younger Viscount, were found guilty of having abetted his return by obtaining false passports for him and were transferred to Rouen on the 11th of May. Being there acquitted, however, they were sent back to the prison of Amiens, from which they were only liberated by the fall of Robespierre, September 14, 1794.

The father of Frances had been on a visit to Gézaincourt at the time of his arrest; Frances and her grandmother found safety in flight and remained for some time concealed in the loft of a little house in the village. They returned to the château as soon as calm was restored, and found that it had almost miraculously escaped pillage.

Fearing, nevertheless, that this visit of the revolutionaries was but a herald of other and possibly more drastic measures, the parish priest removed the Blessed Sacrament from the chapel of Gézaincourt into a room of the house itself. The secret of Its hiding-place was known only to himself and the owners of the château. Shortly afterwards, being pursued as refractory, he was obliged to take refuge in the solitude of the forest. A few weeks were passed in apparent tranquillity, during which Frances and her grandmother devoted themselves to allaying the anxieties of their tenantry, from whom they received unequivocal proofs of fidelity. They found their consolation in the presence of the Divine Guest, who had come to seek a refuge with them, and Frances spent long hours

at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, absorbed in prayer and reparation for the universal apostasy. During these hours the attraction she had always felt for the contemplative life grew in strength, accompanied, however, by the bitter thought that the day of her sacrifice was postponed indefinitely owing to the dispersion of the religious communities.

One evening, in February 1794, while Mlle. de Gézaincourt was thus praying in the secret sanctuary, she was alarmed by the shouts and cries of an angry mob, the clash of arms and the stamping of horses at the gate of the park. It was the revolutionaries, come to seize, as they hoped without resistance, the "old woman" and her granddaughter.

Their attempt at secrecy was, however, frustrated. The alarm had been given, and from all quarters the villagers, armed with hay-forks and shot-guns, made for the château, determined to prevent their entry.

Frances gave one look towards the hiding-place of the Divine Fugitive, then rose and went out to confront the intruders. Presenting herself before their leader, she demanded with outward calm the purpose of their visit. Before her dignified and lofty attitude the ruffians lost countenance and stammered out the order of the Amiens tribunal for their arrest. The peasantry, on their part, declared that as long as they had a drop of blood in their veins no one should interfere with their "mothers."

After two hours' parley Frances succeeded in securing the promise of her grandmother's liberty on condition that she should persuade the tenantry to disperse and should herself accompany the revolutionary rabble. In the middle of the night, therefore, she left Gézaincourt in a cart drawn by four farm horses, and followed, in defiance of the prohibition of the soldiers, by one faithful man-servant.

The night was dark, it was impossible to see whither she was being conducted, and to her inquiry the only reply was a suggestion that she should trust herself to the Republic.

"I experienced then," she said later, "the intense repugnance that one naturally feels at the prospect of a certain and violent death. But these moments of anguish did not last long. I made the sacrifice of my life to God, begging from Him courage to resign myself, and this prayer restored calm to my soul."

Towards eight o'clock the next morning Frances arrived at the Convent of Providence, and learned that her father and several members of her family were already imprisoned there. She besought her gaolers to allow her to join them, but her petition was refused.

The extemporised prison in which Frances now found herself had, up to the time of the Revolution, been occupied by the religious of a teaching institute known as the Sisters of St. Genevieve.

The building was large, the rooms spacious, and an extensive garden, provided with a well of pure water, added greatly to its amenities. Into it, however, were crowded six or seven hundred prisoners, twice as many, that is to say, as could reasonably be accommodated. The winter, moreover, was unusually severe, there was no fire, and the few who could secure the luxury of a mattress were obliged to lay it on the ground.

The prisoners, at any rate at first, took their privations in a philosophic spirit. An Englishwoman thrown into the Providence on suspicion of being a spy, painted, in a letter dated December 20, 1793, a vivid picture of their way of passing the time. "In spite of all we have to endure," she said, "we play the violin, we dress and pay visits to one another as seriously as though we had no troubles. We pile

up two or three beds on one another to serve for card-tables, and the wits of the prison, who in the morning write pathetic petitions for their release, spend the evening in celebrating in verses and acrostics their luck at the gaming-table."

To Mlle. de Gézaincourt this atmosphere of careless frivolity was very uncongenial. "My greatest suffering," she said in reference to those terrible days, "was that I found it almost impossible to keep myself recollected in God." But there, as at home, she found ample scope for her charity. The prisoners were expected to provide their own meals, and in this respect the Blins were better off than most of the others. Every day one of their servants brought them food and kept them informed of what was going on outside. It will be readily understood that in such circumstances Frances many a time went hungry in order to relieve the suffering of those who had none to supply their need.

One day the servant brought bad tidings. The dear old grandmother to whom Frances owed so much, was dead. For some time the servants had succeeded in hiding from her the news of her granddaughter's arrest, but at last her intuition pierced through all their ingenuity. The shock of discovering the truth was so great that Mme. de Fouquesolles' reason was affected. She refused to eat, saying always, "No, I shall wait for my little one." But the little one did not come, and on the 18th March, 1794, the venerable old lady died of inanition at the age of eighty-eight.

The grief of Frances was intense, at the thought that she had not been able to be with her grandmother to tend and soothe her last moments. Long years afterwards, when in the course of conversation anything recalled this poignant memory, she would say in a voice broken with emotion, "How good God was

to take her to her heavenly reward ! She was so good, my poor grandmother."

Meanwhile the zeal of the revolutionaries in making arrests overstrained the accommodation of the prisons, and yet more schools and convents were commandeered for the purpose. Amiens alone, which during the monarchy contained only one prison, in less than two years was provided with ten. Already the men had been removed from the Providence to the hospice of Bicêtre, when one day the arrival of a fresh band of victims rendered a redistribution imperative.

To the women prisoners, therefore, of the Providence was offered the option of a transference to the Carmelite convent. "Do you know how many accepted the offer?" Mère St. Joseph would laughingly ask. "Your humble servant and nobody else."

To the Carmel, therefore, Frances went, escorted across the town by two guards with drawn swords and armed to the teeth. "I was trembling from head to foot," she said, "but deep in my heart I cherished a gleam of hope; so many times during those weeks of agony I had had proof that God never abandons His own."

The villagers of Gézaincourt, meanwhile, were not wasting time in idle lamentations. Not having been able to save the life of Mme. de Fouquesolles, they held a consultation to devise a means of saving her grandchild from the scaffold. An interesting document, which was drawn up as a result of their endeavours, still exists at the municipal offices of the commune. It is an attestation of perfect citizenship granted to the Citizeness Blin, and bearing the signatures of all the inhabitants of the little village.

Frances, however, refused to adopt the suppliant attitude suggested to her and remained a prisoner. Every morning she made her offering to Divine

Providence, and prepared herself to accept all that should befall her during the day. Often, no doubt, her thoughts must have turned to that other prison where her friend Mme. Elizabeth was expiating the crime of royalty. That both were animated by the same heroic dispositions is attested by the beautiful act of resignation which has come down to us from the pen of the Princess. But while the one was to consummate her sacrifice on the scaffold, God was reserving the other to work and to suffer for His glory and for the spread of His Kingdom.

Her new surroundings were much more congenial to Mlle. de Gézaincourt. Among her companions were several Carmelites, including the Prioress. As soon as she returned to her convent, this holy nun took up again the exercises of religious life with the remnant of her community, re-established the enclosure as far as was practicable under the new circumstances, and resumed the ordinary routine of convent life.

Mlle. de Gézaincourt was not with the nuns, but she used to hear them. One day the sounds of an unwonted bustle and disturbance reached her from the improvised cloister. Exclamations of surprise and alarm, the pattering of hasty footsteps, the overthrowing of a chair or two, followed in a moment by an outburst of merry laughter, seemed to indicate that something unusual had happened. Frances, whose cell was situated just above the Community room, listened attentively. It turned out that a poor little mouse had suddenly made its appearance in the midst of the Carmelites assembled at recreation. An armed Jacobin would scarcely have scattered the little group more effectively. The tiny intruder was equally scared and made a hasty escape. The excitement subsided, leaving Frances much amused, and at the same time impressed by the gaiety of the nuns, who,

with the executioner's sword hanging over their heads, could yet extract so much light-hearted enjoyment from the trivial incident. "What a happiness it is," she thought, "to have given oneself to God! One can be cheerful then on the very eve of mounting the scaffold."

If Frances was impressed by the serenity of the religious under their trial, it is no matter for surprise that those who came in contact with them now for the first time were still more deeply struck by their cheerfulness and equanimity, comparing it with the gloomy aspect of the professional philosophers, who failed to find in their high-sounding theories either fortitude to endure their present lot or courage to face the future.

In June 1794 André Dumont was recalled to Paris. He went there in fear and trembling, for he had been guilty of the unpardonable crime of moderation. The department of the Somme was added to the district administered by Joseph Lebon, whose cruelties had made him popular with the members of the Convention, but had won for him throughout France a sinister reputation. It is well known that at Arras the scaffold was kept in permanent readiness, that the governor frequently entertained the executioner to dinner, and that on these occasions the table was decorated with a miniature guillotine instead of with flowers. This inhuman monster took a morbid pleasure in attending executions, and was accustomed to publish each day a kind of gazette containing the names of the victims whose heads were destined to fall the following day.

His subordinates took their cue from him, and the lists of those condemned to pay the extreme penalty were published in the newspapers. One of these found its way to the Carmelite convent, and in it Frances read her own name, with that of her father

and brother. "Though I had lived for months with the prospect of death before my eyes," she confesses, "the definite announcement, and the thought that I should never see my father and brother again except on the scaffold, gave me a moment of exquisite agony. It passed, however, and by the merciful goodness of our Lord I became quite calm. I prayed more earnestly than ever, and felt confident that Almighty God would be our strength at the last moment."

In the designs of Providence, however, the last moment was not so near. The members of the Convention began to quarrel among themselves, and their disputes ended in the fall of Robespierre on July 27. The aged Viscount Blin de Bourdon and his grandson Alexander were among the first prisoners released. On the evening of August 3, Mlle. de Gézaincourt's nephew ran to the Carmel to announce to his aunt that she was free. But Frances, actuated perhaps by the desire of spending the hours of the night in thanksgiving, restrained her natural eagerness. "I have already said my night prayers," she said to the excited little messenger, "to-morrow I shall come home to my father and you." And the following day found her in the arms of her father, inviting him to thank God for their unexpected deliverance.

The care of his estates recalled the Viscount to Bourdon. Thanks to the devotedness of his agents he was not completely ruined by the Revolution, but re-entered into the enjoyment of his revenues, or at least of such a part of them as remained after the governmental exactions had been levied.

The heirs of the Baroness de Fouquesolles, however, were detained at Amiens by business relating to the inheritance of Gézaincourt, a forced delay of twelve months on the part of Frances, who was eager to wing her flight to Carmel. The delay was momentous.

For, little as she suspected it, Frances was destined never to be a Carmelite, and it was at the house in the Rue des Augustins that God was about to erect the sign-post of circumstance indicating the road upon which He would have her enter.

CHAPTER VI

MEETING OF FRANCES AND JULIE

IT was over. The prison doors had opened, the sword so long suspended over the heads of many whose only crime was their nobility of birth had been returned to its scabbard. By the end of September, in his spacious house in the rue des Augustins at Amiens, the Viscount Blin de Bourdon once more saw his children and grandchildren gathered round him as in the peaceful days which now seemed so far distant.

To the mind of Frances, however, her stay at home presented itself merely as a halt on the way to Carmel, the goal of all her hopes and aspirations, and she paid constant visits to the former companions of her captivity while awaiting the day which should see her one of their happy number.

And yet her dream was never to materialise. She was indeed to give herself to God, but not as a daughter of Saint Teresa. In the inscrutable designs of Providence the way by which she was destined to walk was about to be opened before her. The complete plan of God was veiled from her eyes, but even now He was leading her in comparative darkness along the first steps of the road.

One day about this time a sorrow-stricken woman came with her three daughters to throw herself into the compassionate arms of her old friends. It was the Countess Baudouin, who had had the anguish of



Town House of the Blin de Bourdon family, Amiens.

seeing her aged father and her husband perish successively on the scaffold. Crushed with grief, Mme. Baudouin would have been utterly incapable of taking up the threads of life again had it not been for the strong and tender sympathy of a saintly soul whom she had known in the days of her prosperity and who led a life of uninterrupted intercourse with God.

Long before, when she was a young and happy mother, Mme. Baudouin had been accustomed to spend the summer in the delightful district of Beauvais. There she had many friends who shared her own pious interests, and who had taken her with them on their visits to a paralytic whose joyful resignation under affliction had already won for her the appellation of the "Saint of Cuvilly." Julie Billiart was one of those "weak things" of this world whom God chooses to confound the strong. As she lies there nerve-racked and powerless there is little to suggest the great apostolate for which she is destined. Humble and unlettered, she will lead to God many of the noblest among her countrywomen; physically helpless, she will set the world aflame by her activity; insignificant now and unknown, she will one day be acclaimed by the Church as a saint and raised to the honours of Her altars.

Long years spent in the school of suffering had taught Julie not merely to endure, but to love the Will of God, and had qualified her to communicate to others something of her own unflinching confidence. When, therefore, the hour of bereavement sounded, Mme. Baudouin remembered the great-souled peasant and longed for the support of her presence.

But meanwhile persecution had been the lot of the "Saint of Cuvilly" also. A schismatic priest had been forced upon the parish, and her influence in opposing him made her an object of detestation to the

tyrannical apostles of the new liberty. At no small risk, her loyal friends had transported her from one refuge to another. "My God," she exclaimed wistfully, "will you not give me a home in your Paradise, since I can no longer find a shelter upon earth?"

At last, in company with her niece Félicité, she found a resting-place at Compiègne, and it was there that God gave her the first inkling of her mission. One day, as she was praying at the foot of the Cross, her soul was raised to the heights of contemplation. Rapt into ecstasy, she saw herself surrounded by a multitude of religious wearing a habit which was so far unfamiliar to her. The face of every nun whom she beheld there was indelibly impressed upon her memory, and the vision which gave her hope and courage to bear the trials of the present, provided also the solution of many a difficult problem in the days that were to come.

But the hour of a signal grace is often the hour when faith is put to a supreme test. The course of events at Compiègne seemed to give little promise of the fulfilment of the vision. The populace of the little town lived in hourly terror of their lives, and the fury of the revolutionaries reached its height in the martyrdom of sixteen Carmelite nuns. Julie indeed would gladly have shared their heroic fate, but God willed otherwise and she was saved with many others by the fall of Robespierre.

As soon as communication was re-established between the various parts of France, Julie heard of the double sorrow which had befallen her former benefactress. Mme. Baudouin, on her side, delighted to have got into touch with Julie once more, devised a means of securing her constant presence. Discovering in her friends' house a tiny suite of rooms which seemed exactly suitable, she begged leave to

rent it for her dear invalid, and wrote letter after letter to beg Julie to leave Compiègne for Amiens. Julie was at first averse to the plan; moreover, she was in such constant suffering that the journey seemed out of the question. Mme. Baudouin was persistent, however, and at last, after long debate with herself, the invalid saw in the reiterated invitation an expression of the Will of God and decided to accept it. So one day in October 1794 she took her place in the roomy carriage which had been sent for her, and, attended by Félicité, set out for Amiens.

On her arrival she was carried to the bed prepared for her. Mme. Baudouin received her with tenderness, and found in her presence and in the support of her sympathy courage to bear her heavy cross.

After Julie had been a few days in the house Mme. Baudouin invited her hostess to accompany her to the bedside of her dear invalid. Frances assented, but without being infected by Mme. Baudouin's enthusiasm. The intense and prolonged nerve-strain to which Julie had been subjected had intensified her nervous affection. The paralysis had extended itself to her jaws, and articulation was painful and incoherent. Mlle. de Gézaincourt, who could not understand a word, confessed later that she found her visit embarrassing, and was repelled rather than attracted. Nevertheless she did not discontinue her visits. She undertook to read to Julie, and ministered with kindness to her needs, preparing refreshing drinks and tempting her appetite with dainty food. Gradually the personality of Julie triumphed over the accidental limitations which obscured her real attractiveness, and Frances, who had come out of charity, remained out of devotion.

On the part of the saintly invalid there was no attempt to capture Frances; with rare strength Julie restrained any outward effort to hasten God's moment,

though she was made aware that something more than a passing acquaintance was to knit her soul to the soul of her visitor. For, in a flash, Julie had recognised in her form and features the figure which occupied the foremost place in her vision at Compiègne. Here was the first token of the elucidation of that prophetic vision, yet, with a trustful waiting on the Will of God which was characteristic of her, Julie made no advance, nor did she speak to anyone at this time of her spiritual experience. Little by little Mlle. de Gézaincourt discovered the treasures of grace enshrined in the humble casket of Julie's soul, while Julie on her side recognised the rich intellectual and spiritual gifts which were characteristic of Frances, and which were allied to such perfect distinction and charm of manner.

Rarely perhaps were two individualities more diverse in all accidental circumstances than these two, and the world, which lays so exaggerated a store by such things, would have said it was impossible for them ever to find association congenial. And yet in the plane of spiritual interests they met and understood each other. Once the awkwardness of their intercourse, due to Julie's difficulty of speech, had worn off, they made progress towards intimacy. Frances confided to Julie her longings to become a Carmelite, and received from her in return and unobtrusively the guidance in prayer which her own life of union with God so admirably qualified her to give.

There was a holy priest whom Mme. Baudouin had known in Paris, and who was at this time living in seclusion in Amiens, where the atmosphere was less charged with danger for him than in many other towns. He was called Father Thomas, though, for precaution's sake, he concealed both his name and the fact of his priesthood from all save a few trusted persons.

The Countess brought him to Julie's bedside, and he became her confessor and a true friend to her in every way. With a charity which was untiring he came every day to give the saintly invalid Holy Communion. When the friends from Brittany with whom he had been staying left Amiens to return home, Father Thomas in his turn became a guest in the house of M. Blin. This step brought great happiness to all the household, for now they had a priest under their roof, they were able to enjoy the privilege of daily Mass. The altar on which the Holy Sacrifice was celebrated was in Julie's room, and as a precaution was dismantled every morning. Every day at this Mass Julie and Mlle. de Gézaincourt had the happiness of receiving Holy Communion.

The house, indeed, began to take on some of the characteristics of a convent. Lise, the youngest daughter of Mme. Baudouin, was devotedly attached to Julie, and brought with her to the invalid's bedside several of her own friends. Chief among these were two pairs of sisters, Jeanne and Aglaë de Méry, and the two Dorias. Both these families bore distinguished names and were remarkable for their staunch Catholicism no less than for their rank. Frances, together with Lise Baudouin and these four young girls, met often in Julie's little room and began under her direction to follow a definite rule of life. They made meditation daily and recited the Office of Our Blessed Lady in common. They worked assiduously for the churches and for the poor, whom they also visited in their houses. None of them except Frances was destined to be permanently associated with Julie; in Frances, however, she found a soul akin to her own. In the world outside there was political unrest and passion, but in the invalid's room there was peace. In the archives of the Mother House at Namur the

Sisters of Notre Dame still preserve an Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart bearing the signature of Frances, by which these souls consecrated themselves to the service of God, together with acts of consecration to Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph. All of these bear the date of 1795 and show that the future Sisters of Notre Dame were informed by the spirit of solid devotion.

Some months later, Frances found it necessary to go to Gézaincourt to wind up her affairs there, and she left Amiens regretfully on July 2, after solemnly renewing her consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the presence of Father Thomas, Julie and her young companions.

The gulf of separation was bridged by a series of thirty letters, which are invaluable as giving an insight into both these chosen souls. In these letters Julie directs and encourages Frances in the ascetical and devotional practices which she has adopted, and sustains her by her sympathy in the most painful of her trials, her anxiety regarding her father's spiritual state. They reveal to us the soundness of Julie's judgment, the tenderness of her heart and her unswerving trust in God.

CHAPTER VII

A FRUITFUL FRIENDSHIP

THE plans of God are worked out with a leisureliness which is in strong contrast to the feverish haste of man. Frances was now thirty-nine years old, and it was ordained that she should pass yet two years in the school of simple home duties before she embarked upon the sea of her life's career.

Outwardly the time she spent at Gézaincourt offers little to her biographer; she lived as did the friends of her own rank, performing her social duties, acting as hostess to the visitors at the château, returning their visits, caring too for the poor according to the traditions of the de Fouquesolles. The greatness of her life was in the spirit with which she carried out these every-day occupations. All the while her spiritual life was deepening, her union with God becoming closer; all the while she was directing her actions by the noblest ideals and was winning back to the service of God many of those in whom the troubles of the times had well-nigh effaced the love and practice of their Faith. And all the while, too, she was exercising the virtues of a novitiate: self-abnegation, detachment and zeal for souls.

Her presence at Gézaincourt had been necessitated by the winding up of the estate of the late Baroness, by whom, it will be remembered, the property and title had been settled upon Frances from babyhood. No sooner had the act been signed which made her

mistress of that lordly estate than Frances solemnly renounced the title, made her property over to her brother and gave to her sister gifts of equivalent value.

The world was not slow to criticise what, from its own point of view, was a piece of folly, and considered Mlle. Blin de Bourdon (as Frances was now designated) guilty of extreme imprudence. The step, no doubt, cost her much; it would be impossible for anyone to sever, as she thus did, all the ties of her childhood without pain. But in the light of her consuming desire for the religious life, the sacrifice was made willingly and the criticisms and persuasions of her friends left her unmoved.

The villagers of Gézaincourt were grieved at the loss of the gentle mistress to whom they were so loyally attached. But as far as their personal experience was to go, they soon discovered that the change of ruler implied no change of rule. Like all the Blins, Viscount Louis Marie César had a large heart and an open hand. His tenants were freely admitted to the enjoyment of the park, and his intercourse with them was kindly and familiar. There was a story current in the village which throws an interesting side-light upon his character. One day the Viscount in person was distributing alms at the door of the château. There was a large gathering of beggars, but the generous giver forgot none of them. He noticed, however, that one man presented himself over and over again, effecting each time certain small changes in his outward appearance. Five times already the ingenious fellow had carried out his plan without remonstrance, but on the sixth the Viscount said to him quietly: "My good man, I have recognised you quite well under your various disguises. Here is my sixth present to you, but I warn you that the seventh

will be of a different sort." The beggar, needless to say, did not reappear.

But such instances of bad faith never exhausted his passion for giving: it even happened sometimes that his generous distributions of food and firewood trenched largely on the winter supplies of the château itself. Then he would try the plan of giving money to the poor with which to go and buy what they were in need of from his steward.

Seeing his great charity, Frances had no reason to regret the choice she had made of an heir, and being determined to live in the practice of voluntary poverty, she conceived a plan for devoting the remainder of her fortune to the education of priests.

The letters by which, as we have said, intercourse between Frances and her spiritual mother was kept up, show how close a friendship had grown up between these two souls, destined as they were to be the complement each of the other in a great undertaking for God's glory. Father Thomas, when he first came as a permanent guest to the Hôtel Blin, had recognised the great graces bestowed on Julie, and her remarkable gift of prayer. He felt convinced that God designed her to be His instrument for great things, and when Mlle. Blin revealed her desire to enter religion, he put her under the spiritual guidance of Julie. Julie at first shrank from the responsibility, but Father Thomas obliged her by obedience to undertake it.

The arrangement was visibly blessed, and their correspondence is marked by a tone of frank tenderness on the one side and by implicit trust on the other. "What comfort your dear letter gave me!" writes Julie about a fortnight after their separation; "I cannot tell you how much your absence costs me. However, by the grace of God I am ready to make all the sacrifices He requires of me. Every day at the

precious time of Holy Communion I meet in spirit my kind young lady, my dear friend in Our Lord, for I cannot call you anything else: you know that it is in God and for God that I love you so tenderly."

Occasionally we find a reference to politics, especially when these bore upon the religious situation. By a law passed in 1795 it became at last possible for the faithful to reclaim their parish churches. It was the first step towards the restoration of Catholic worship, though the degree of facility with which it was put into operation varied considerably according to the caprice of the individuals who held office in the various departments.

Father Thomas, with other priests, either released from prison or returned from exile, determined to set on foot the preliminary procedure demanded by the law. He gathered the first-fruits of success at Montdidier after incalculable trouble. Julie refers, in a letter written in August 1795, to his thirteenth and successful journey thither. In that month M. Bigorgne, vicar-general of the Bishop of Amiens, accompanied him, and together they carried out the reconciliation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which had been profaned by the revolutionaries.

It would be difficult to describe the joy of the people when the edifice was restored to its sacred purpose. Father Thomas wrote to Julie and her companions, calling upon them to give thanks to God, who had blessed his efforts with success. Then with untiring zeal he devoted himself to preparing the children for their first Communion.

His activity naturally drew upon him the unwelcome attentions of the authorities, and they demanded from him and from all priests a formal act of submission to the Republic. Frances, hearing this, was alarmed, fearing very naturally that the measure might involve

some compromise of principle, and there is no passage in the correspondence of this period which marks more clearly the respect in which Mlle. Blin held the judgment of Julie than that which refers to this subject. Father Thomas was in no hurry to give in his submission, but he did so finally, after the question had been thoroughly examined by the Diocesan authorities.

At Gézaincourt a sort of spiritual stupefaction seemed to have fallen upon the simple villagers when Frances had been so rudely taken from them by the Revolutionaries, and the zealous priest to whom the religious interests of the district had been confided had much reason to rejoice at her return. She had at once set herself to help in restoring the religious spirit in the little village, a work in which her own example was her most effective instrument. Resuming at once her accustomed acts of charity and her pious practices, she exercised her zeal with earnestness and tact. Her perseverance, however, cost her some very natural struggles with her human respect, and in this matter her spiritual mother was her chief support. She was for some time the only person in the village who went to Holy Communion. Julie writes to her on August 1: "No, I am not at all surprised that your human respect should be awakened because you are the only person going to Holy Communion. Oh, what a happiness, my dearest friend, that the good God should make use of us to give good example! You remember, of course, the words of Our Lord that we should so let our light shine before men that they may glorify our Father in Heaven, and most of all during such a time as the present. Oh no! we can never do enough. . . ." The letter concludes with a promise to pray for all those whom Frances had recommended to her prayers, and

especially for her nephew, whom she was preparing for his first Communion.

Towards the close of the year 1795 Mlle. Blin was called to Bourdon to rejoin her father, whose advanced age made him realise the imminence of death, and who wished to have his daughter near him. Though he was too much of a gentleman to interfere with her pious practices, the disciple of Voltaire still remained unmoved by grace, and his example had had a pernicious effect on many of the villagers, who lived in indifference to the things of faith. The spirit of the little village of Bourdon had sadly changed during the nine years which had elapsed since Frances had left it. The priest who had been in charge of the parish since 1780, a certain Father Duplan, had taken the constitutional oath in 1791, rather because he misunderstood its bearings than out of weakness. Like many others of the country priests, he had the courage to retract it publicly as soon as he realised that he had taken a false step, and as a consequence of this retraction he was obliged to flee the country, finding refuge at Dover until 1800. During his absence a schismatical priest was intruded into the parish by the civil authorities, acting under the powers conferred upon them by the schismatical Bishop of Amiens. The same authorities who had installed him ordered him, in January 1794, to cease practising his religious functions.

The church was thereupon despoiled by the revolutionary vandals: two of its bells were carried off and the third used to assemble the people for the elections. The altar linen and silver vessels were removed to the district headquarters, and the altar, tabernacle, pictures and church furnishings were sold for a song. The building itself, with the presbytery, was put up for sale as being the property of the nation, and was

disposed of in September 1795. With the spoliation of the church disappeared for ever also the privileges which had been bestowed on the Lords of Bourdon, its founders and benefactors. Yet, saddest of all, the actual head of that family was too indifferent to resist these indignities.

And Frances! Who can describe her mental anguish during these last months of her father's life, an anguish measured by her keen faith, with its vivid realisation of the issues at stake, and her love for her father, in whose heart the torch of faith was apparently extinguished?

It was to Julie again that she turned in her anxiety. She wrote telling of the failure of one of her attempts, and Julie, who shared her sorrow, replied, on October 21, with a letter in which the confidence of the saint and the tact of the wise guide of souls were mingled. She recommends Frances not to be discouraged, to say nothing more on the subject for the moment, and to continue to show her tender affection for her father. "Who can tell God's moments, my dear friend? And for that reason we must not get weary of waiting. Our good God has waited so long for us. Oh, how good He is!"

A further attempt to broach the subject just before Christmas met with no greater success, and again Julie writes trustfully, hopefully, soothingly, urging her to throw herself absolutely into the hands of Divine Providence and to trust God blindly.

At Bourdon, as at Gézaincourt, Frances threw all her energies into the apostolate which was the consuming passion of her soul. A priest who had not taken the oath, came to exercise his ministry secretly at Bourdon, and, the presbytery not being available, he was lodged in the château. Frances was, of course, the instrument by which he re-established the Kingdom

of Christ in the little village. The generous gifts she made of all that was necessary for the fitting celebration of the Divine Service were given out of her own private means, but the most effective gift of all was her own example.

Self-critical as she was at this stage of her interior life, Frances was afraid that her natural joy over the souls she was enabled to win back to God might turn to a subtle form of self-satisfaction. She evidently communicated this fact to her spiritual guide, whose sanity of judgment and simplicity were evidenced in her encouraging reply: "Courage, my dear friend; you still consider yourself of no use in making others glorify the good God. Well, well! Do not worry yourself about it. Our stupidities must not be any obstacle to the grace of God in us. I can tell you from my own experience that it is often after these blunders that God makes use of us, because He sees then that we are in our proper place of good-for-nothings. Nothing leaves the operation of grace more at liberty in us than the humble disposition in which we put ourselves. Father Thomas bids you not to be disturbed even if you make blunders, but simply offer them to God for your own humiliation, for the constant examination of ourselves is extremely harmful.

"The good God loves making something out of nothing, but the devil, who dreads nothing so much as to let his victims escape, does not fail to raise alarm in timid souls to prevent them from contributing to secure the glory of God."

All the letters of Julie bear the stamp of her apostolic spirit, and are calculated to animate the same zeal in the heart of their recipient. "Your letter gave me consolation," she writes in February 1796, "because it seems that our good God is willing to make use of you to teach the little children to know and love Him.

I congratulate you and urge you most strongly to give yourself to this work heart and soul. Receive all those who come to you as coming from Him—robbers, reprobates, all are good; when one is only inspired by the love of God, sooner or later He allows the moment to come when grace has its way with these poor people.”

On another occasion she writes in the playful style which suits her so well: “I bless God for the progress your children are making. I hope He will bless them and you too. As for your return, you will see for yourself when your children can reasonably do without you; you will stay as long as is necessary to strengthen them in the way, especially that good man; the present moment is too precious for him, you must keep hold of his hand as tight as you can.”

These letters, to which we are indebted for most of our knowledge of Frances at this time, are delightful reading, though we are obliged to infer the contents of Mlle. Blin’s own letters from the replies. The zeal for God’s glory and for the salvation of souls which consumed the writer is manifest on every page, and it served to kindle the same flame in the dry wood of the soul of Frances. In their simplicity and delicate humour they show the perfect poise of Julie’s judgment and her sense of proportion. Now and again there is a reference to her conviction that she will end her days with Frances, though from the form of the allusion it is clear that the manner in which this was to be carried out is still a mystery. The ways of God are inscrutable, and she realises that He asks from her complete dependence on His good pleasure in the matter. But, then, if it is His holy will He will remove all difficulties which now stand in the way of its accomplishment.

The charity of Mlle. Blin was always mindful of the

needs of her poor friend, and Julie writes her grateful acknowledgments. "What a wonderful Providence it is that God has given me the privilege of knowing you, and how grateful I am for all the kind care you bestow upon me. I received your cake. I am quite confused to think that God gives me not only bread but sugar too. You want me to tell you quite simply how matters stand with regard to the paper money. I will tell you then, my dear good friend. The good God has blessed your kindness to me. Félicité sold the muslin you gave me, and with the proceeds she bought the materials necessary for her work. With what she earns she is able to procure food. Like me, she is deeply touched by your charity; you are anxious she should not go hungry, nor will she as long as she has work."

Julie, it must be remembered, would not allow herself to be a burden to anyone. She enjoyed her little lodging free, but she plied her needle assiduously whenever her infirmities permitted, and with the help of her niece, who was a skilful lacemaker, she even succeeded in having on occasion the means of helping those still poorer than herself. In return for the charity she received from the Countess Baudouin, Julie held herself constantly at her disposal, her door was always open to her, and her prayers, advice and sympathy richly repaid the debt of gratitude she owed to her kind and generous friend.

In the latter part of October 1795 Mme. Baudouin visited Paris. The old friends whom she met there joyfully welcomed her back to the capital, and urged her in the interests of her children to take up her residence there. Mme. Baudouin was at first reluctant, but little by little she began to regard the idea with less disfavour and, over hastily, as the event showed, relinquished the apartments she had occupied

at the Hôtel Blin de Bourdon. She tried to persuade Julie to join her, but without success. "They talk a good deal to me of Paris," wrote Julie to Frances, "but I always show somewhat the repugnance I feel for living in that Babylon." Frances, after the departure of Mme. Baudouin, confided to Julie her desire to persuade her father to leave Bourdon and return to Amiens. No doubt she hoped that at Amiens the influence of Father Thomas and of her holy friend might bring about the conversion which all were so ardently praying for. It is clear too that Julie favoured the project, but as usual she subordinated her personal desire to the Divine will. "If your dear father agrees to the suggestion," she writes, "I assure you I shall see in it a distinct guidance of the good God."

M. Blin, however, refused to leave the country, and on her side also Mme. Baudouin began to regret the step she had taken and to long in Paris for the quietude and happiness of Amiens. Disappointed in her efforts to secure two houses which would have been suitable for her, she begged Frances to intercede with her sister-in-law and to secure for her again the suite of rooms she had given up. She made use of Julie as her advocate. "Our good Julie tells me, Mademoiselle, that she has explained my difficulties to you. I have been now so long living in this way that I have begun to adapt myself to it. Julie says it is not an opportune time to go to Paris, and you know how much I respect her decisions. Do then be good enough to ask Mme. Blin to allow me to remain with her." And so the matter was settled and Mme. Baudouin returned to the rue des Augustins.

At Bourdon, meanwhile, M. Blin was growing gradually weaker. Frances continued her apostolic

work and was rewarded in some cases with almost miraculous success. A servant, ignorant, but in good faith, was instructed by her and immediately set to work to convert her husband. The force of his example brought back to the Church several of his fellow-workmen; children and young girls began again to attend the church they had so long deserted, and gradually something of a religious spirit and of observance of the Commandments began to make itself felt in the place. All too slowly, also, the frequentation of the Sacraments was resumed.

Towards Easter, 1796, Frances had the consolation of seeing that her father had apparently signed a new lease of life. With characteristic consideration he proposed that his daughter should profit by his improved health to visit Amiens for a change and rest. Frances decided to spend the time in making the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius under the direction of Father Thomas. The notes of her retreat show that it was a time of special illumination in regard to the relations between God and the soul, and to the nature and effects of union with Our Lord. In the vivid light shed upon her soul, old and oft-repeated truths passed from the region of vague assent to that keen realisation in which they become the principles of action.

The insight God bestowed upon her during these days of retirement and prayer made Frances severe in her judgments of herself and established her in a deep and resolute humility.

She had intended to pass the full thirty days in making the exercises, but a relapse recalled her to the side of her father before she had completed them. Once again, however, his wonderful vitality triumphed, and he recovered his strength. Her brother, the young Viscount, took advantage of this amelioration

to suggest a visit to Gézaincourt, and as his father's authority supported his invitation, Frances spent some weeks during the autumn in the home of her childhood. The religious situation there was not too encouraging. A constitutional priest had taken the place of the rightful curé, and the parishioners, who did not understand the situation, were attending the services of the schismatic and sending their children, among whom were some of those who had been instructed by Frances the year before, to his explanations of the Catechism. Moreover, emboldened by the support of the secular authorities, he went so far as to demand the complete control of the chapel of the château. Mlle. Blin urged her brother to resist him, but on his renewing his demand she consulted Father Thomas as to the legal rights of the case. Father Thomas replied that they could not legally refuse him access to the chapel, but suggested that they should not and indeed ought not to provide anything needed for Catholic worship.

Less far-seeing people, who did not realise the forfeiture of principle involved, criticised this course of action, maintaining that it was better to be schismatic than entirely uninstructed. The reply to this criticism came in no halting voice from Amiens. Basing his decision on the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas, that "it is better to be ignorant than to be heretical or schismatical," Father Thomas encouraged Frances and her brother in their course of action, reminding them that God would never permit a soul, who in good faith is seeking for salvation, to perish.

In the course of the summer Mme. Baudouin died in Paris. She had left her youngest daughter, Lise, behind her at Amiens, and, as though under the influence of some strong presentiment, she had recommended her more earnestly than ever to the

solicitude of Julie and Father Thomas. She never saw her again. This young girl appears to have been very emotional and impressionable, but unstable and lacking in perseverance. She was consequently a subject of anxiety to her mother and to her friends, whose gifts of character were of a more solid nature. Julie, it is evident, was tenderly attached to her, and devoted herself to her assiduously, though always with a certain apprehension as to the ultimate success of her efforts.

On receiving the news of her mother's death Lise abandoned herself for a while to the most violent grief, and then, soothed by the tender affection of Julie, threw herself upon her and confided to her that this cross had made her realise the instability of human joys and that she was resolved to choose the higher path of renunciation.

Her decision filled with joy the hearts of both Julie and Frances, who judged, rather prematurely, that their anxieties concerning their young friend were now at an end. Lise succeeded in bringing her four young friends, the Dorias and the de Mérys, to live with her in Mme. Baudouin's apartments in the house of the rue des Augustins. The little community of six began to follow a rule of life indicated by Father Thomas, chanted the office of Our Lady, lived the common life and addressed Julie as Ma Mère. A little school was organised in one of the buildings connected with the house, and these young ladies undertook the teaching of the children who attended it.

From a distance Frances followed with secret envy the development of the new community, but the moment was at hand when the loss of the father she so tenderly loved would set her free to follow her heart's desire.

In the opening days of December a sudden general

collapse triumphed over the magnificent resistance of the Viscount's constitution. The doctors, whose warnings had been so often falsified, looked grave and hesitated when Frances questioned them as to the possibility of another recovery. Their silence was eloquent, and it became clear to the anguished heart of the daughter that the moment had come when she must do open battle for her father's soul. Humanly speaking there seemed to be little hope, long years of infidelity to grace had erected barriers of worldly judgment and human respect not easily to be thrown down. But the long tale of prayers and sacrifices which had sped to Heaven on the wings of filial love had not been lost. Patience, submission, trust, unwearying perseverance through years of no apparent response were all to meet with their reward. In the face of death, the torch of his childhood's faith, which had been stifled by the ashes of worldliness, was kindled anew and the pleadings of his child were rendered efficacious by the grace which rewarded her prayers. The joy which filled the heart of Frances made all her sufferings, all her fears, all her anguish well worth while. From the day when her father made his peace with God till the day of his death the Viscount recited every morning with his daughter the Penitential Psalms and the Te Deum, and on the 1st of February he breathed forth his soul to God on the wings of penance and hope. In such a death there is no sting, and the joy which the angels of God feel over a sinner who does penance must have overflowed the soul of Frances and left no room for the bitterness of parting.

The letter of sympathy written to her by Julie shows that she understood this. She prays that God may show him mercy and give him peace, and unites her thanksgivings with those of her friend for his repentant

and consoling death. She promises to pray specially for Frances during the time that will elapse before they meet again, and concludes by voicing her confidence that God will show her His adorable will in regard to her future. As soon as the temporal affairs of her father were settled, Frances flew back to Amiens like a homing bird, bringing joy with her, but leaving a corresponding sense of desolation behind.

CHAPTER VIII

AMIENS AND BETTENCOURT

THE debt of filial duty was paid, and Frances was free to follow her vocation to the religious life. But she had, like so many others before and since, to endure the wrench from home ties which is so much more painful than the material sacrifices involved in leaving the world. For these demand only one's own suffering and they become almost light in the ardent desire to press towards the mark, which is the frequent accompaniment of a call to the higher life. But it needs courage of a more heroic order to steel one's heart against the voice of one's own kinsfolk, and to resist the pleading which is made eloquent by affection. Her brother, Viscount Louis Marie César, had always loved Frances with a special predilection, and when he saw her refuse the brilliant offers of marriage which had been made to her, he still hoped to persuade her to take up her residence with him, the more so as Frances and his wife understood one another perfectly. Every argument that his devotion to his sister could suggest was brought up in turn to shatter her resolve. She was beyond the age when it is easy to adapt oneself to an austere way of life, she would find it difficult to give up the liberty she had enjoyed and which she had turned to such good account, the seed she had sown at Gézaincourt and at Bourdon was just beginning to sprout and would perish in the blade if

her fostering care were withdrawn. The arguments were perfectly sound as far as human reasoning and human foresight could judge, but the decision of Frances was based on something higher than human reasoning, and, as always happens, its wisdom was vindicated by the result. So, to use her own vigorous expression, holding her heart in both hands that it might not escape, she declared that no consideration whatever would turn her aside from her project, and that with the help of God's grace her life and death should be consecrated to Him. And her brother, convinced that her determination was inspired, insisted no further.

These were not the only difficulties to be overcome. Two years before, when no immediate decision was called for, Frances in her own mind looked forward to Carmel as the goal of her aspirations; now when the moment for action came and she was free to take the final step, she found herself enveloped in the mist of doubt. No longer could she feel certain that she was called to a contemplative life, and this uncertainty was a still greater trial to her than the opposition she encountered from her family. Julie, moreover, had given her no direction on the point. In her admirable prudence she had told Frances no details about her vision at Compiègne. She felt convinced that in some way she and Frances were destined to co-operate, but she did not clearly see in what way, and she trusted that God would indicate to her the moment to speak. In the early stages of their correspondence, when Frances seemed certain of her vocation for the Carmelites, Julie had written to her at Gézaincourt: "There seems no likelihood of seeing you here (at Amiens) so soon. I pray as you do that you may come to live here for good, and especially to be a holy

daughter of St. Teresa . . . but, when God wills." And three months later, when the moment of entering Carmel seemed postponed indefinitely, she wrote: "If God wants to make a Carmelite of you, He will certainly find the means to do so."

About Christmas, 1795, Julie strikes a different note, and alludes to an assurance she has communicated to Frances that God will grant her the favour of ending her days with her friend. It is clear, however, that though she is sure that this will be, Julie is still in the dark as to how it will be. "How inscrutable are the plans of God!" she writes, "but this I do know, that He demands of me a complete dependence on His good pleasure in all things."

And again, a year later, Julie says: "I always have in view what I once told you, though there are events which would seem to destroy my hopes, but since I only want in all this the glory of God, I trust that of His goodness He will arrange everything for the best. He asks that I should be very completely dependent upon Him, and that the tokens of His providence which He has always shown me should lead me to abandon myself totally into His hands."

A surer tone marks the letter which Julie wrote on the occasion of the death of M. Blin. In this she urges Frances to unite herself with her, that together they may fulfil the designs of Providence over them. She has no doubt whatever that God has some special plan for Frances, but, she adds characteristically, "We will only advance step by step, always consulting the holy Will of God. Let me tell you quite simply," she proceeds, "as soon as I heard of your dear father's death I saw you throw yourself into my arms. I was very much impressed when I saw this. It seemed to me that the moment was at hand when the good God

would give you to me and me to you so strongly that nothing but Death should separate us."

The story of Julie's attitude to the vocation of Frances reveals not only her complete disinterestedness, but a wonderful strength of soul arising from humility and devotion to the Will of God. Though the vision she had had at Compiègne had made it clear to her that Frances and she were to be in some way associated, she never obtruded her own view upon her spiritual daughter, even though she might have claimed in its support this mysterious enlightenment. Instead, as long as Frances herself seemed convinced of her call to Carmel, Julie seconded her plan, not venturing to question the genuineness of her friend's inspiration though it seemed to run counter to her own. Even so, we remember, Abraham, in blind obedience, set about sacrificing the only human means of the fulfilment of God's prophecy to himself.

When, however, she noted that a cloud of indecision had overshadowed this apparent certainty, and when, further, she herself received a second mystic indication of God's will, she no longer hesitated to speak. Step by step these two souls groped their way along, receiving from God light enough for the moment and acting in accordance with that, with no view of the distant scene towards which He was leading them by means of their docility and trust.

One more trial was to come upon Frances before she should taste the peace and tranquillity of her final surrender. In the disturbed mental condition induced by anxiety and doubt certain trivial discrepancies in the letters of her spiritual guide became exaggerated till they seemed to take on the character of deliberate equivocations, and she was tempted to distrust Julie herself. To a nature of such absolute truthfulness

the temptation was subtly adapted, but by that truthfulness itself it was mastered. Frances wrote to Julie and exposed with perfect candour the state of her soul. Before the humility of Julie's reply the last doubts fell. Julie realised the force of the temptation and replied: "I do not doubt that the devil is making efforts at this time to inspire you with disgust for me,—he knows too well what he is going to lose not to show you the ridiculous side of this step. Of course, my child, you will see in me very great imperfections; yes, there they are. It is only from my own experience that I can learn to be charitable and compassionate to the imperfections, the weaknesses and faults of others. All these things I discover in myself, but with the grace of God I am determined not to encourage them and to correct myself of them. Do not spare me, my dear child, tell me all the faults you see in me and pray God that I may become a saint at whatever cost."

The directness and magnanimity of this reply showed clearly that Julie was actuated by the desire of fulfilling the Will of God and not by any self-seeking or craving for esteem. And when shortly afterwards Mlle. Blin took her place among the little community at Julie's side, none of them suspected the sharp mental trial through which she had passed. Once more back at Amiens, Frances, anxious to see more clearly the "views of God in her regard" to which Julie's letter had referred, isolated herself from her companions and made a ten days' retreat.

On one of the days of this retreat, when Father Thomas was speaking with earnestness and vehemence of the rights of God, disregarded by so many because unrealised by them, Frances understood clearly that God was calling her to the voluntary sacrifice of all

her rights by the practice of obedience, and to that of all her temporal goods for the sake of others. Following the gleam of grace she made the sacrifice of her dream of Carmel and put herself unreservedly into the hands of Julie, whom she recognised as the interpreter of God's will in her regard, while as to her worldly possessions she resolved only to use them henceforth for the good works undertaken by Julie. And her contemporaries bore witness that from this time, though as yet bound by no vow, she never disposed of the smallest portion of the property which still remained to her without consulting her spiritual mother.

It seemed as though the day was at hand for the fulfilment of the vision of Compiègne. In Amiens and around about, the little community of the rue des Augustins was receiving the highest commendations; the praises of their charity to the poor, of their patience towards the sick and suffering, of their wonderful success in teaching the Catechism and preparing young and old alike for the reception of the Sacraments, were on every tongue.

The Bishop of Amiens was at this time still in exile, and the Bishop of St. Papoul came to administer Confirmation in his stead. At the close of the ceremony he visited the Hôtel Blin, and in Julie's little room confirmed several members of the best-known families of Amiens.

A work so visibly blessed in its beginnings gave room for great hopes for the future: every day saw the field of the pious activities of the little group extend more widely, every day added to the list of ignorant persons instructed, sick visited, and negligent Catholics won back to the practice of their faith. The burning words of Julie kindled laggard souls to

fervour, and the self-abnegation of her companion was an exhortation no less eloquent in its silence; her example smoothed the rough ways, and her serene and cheerful disposition brought sunshine into their daily life.

Yet Julie did not at this moment contemplate the establishment of a religious order; moreover, she was too well versed in the ways of God not to know that His works are always sanctified by suffering. Her vision, too, at Compiègne, in the light of which she regarded all the developments of her life, had shown her the group of her religious daughters gathered round the Crucifix. And so, where many a person less wise might have been over elated, Julie waited patiently to see God plunge the undertaking into the furnace of contradiction, and stamp it with the hall-mark of His Cross.

She had not long to wait. And the first blow came from within, and from the youngest of her little flock. Lise Baudouin, whose vocation was the fruit of Julie's patience and prayers, faltering in the resolution she had made of consecrating her life to God, gave way to an impulse of affection for her elder sister and severed her connection with the others. She did not long enjoy the natural happiness at which she thus too eagerly grasped, for the sister for whose sake she had bartered her high privilege died within a few months.

There seems to have been no doubt that she had a genuine vocation and her unfaithfulness to grace was a cruel disappointment to both Julie and Frances. Even thirteen years later, in 1810, Mère Julie wrote to Mère St. Joseph: "You know, my dear friend, the defection of my poor Lise inflicted on my heart a wound which will bleed till my death."

Another of her young friends, Aglaë de Méry, was led to take a similar step for a similar reason. Her happiness was not much longer lived than that of Mlle. Baudouin. The Memoirs of Mère St. Joseph tell us that after having enjoyed for about two years the society of her sister she died under pitiable circumstances. Jeanne de Méry and Françoise Doria married and practised in the home circle the virtues they had cultivated during the happy days at Amiens; while, as soon as the religious communities were reorganised, Josephine Doria left the Hôtel Blin to enter the order of the Visitation.

Thus at the end of five years of the embryo Community there remained only Julie and Frances. The latter had no hesitations, no doubts. The light which had illumined her path during the memorable retreat of 1797 had shown her clearly that where Julie went, it was God's will that she should follow. This interior conviction eliminated a host of difficulties, and reduced her conduct to great simplicity. It was no longer necessary to consider whether her temperament was congenial with that of Julie, whether a permanent association would be advisable, workable, advantageous. God wanted that association, and if so He would make it possible, fruitful, even in His generosity, delightful. This is the explanation of a partnership which the world would deride as too quixotic to be permanent, between two persons as different in social standing, education and worldly experience as Frances, the nobly born and delicately bred daughter of the *haute noblesse*, and Julie, the humble and hard-working peasant saint of Cuvilly.

While Mère Julie was watching the gradual scattering of her little flock, the persecution, which had slackened for a moment, broke out anew. No longer

satisfied with demanding a promise of obedience to the new order, the authorities insisted on an oath of hatred to royalty from all holders of public office. Priests were tracked down, deported, treated with barbaric cruelty. At Amiens the municipal authorities were already regarded with suspicion for their leniency towards Catholics. They were consequently expelled from office, and their successors forbade the refractory priests to exercise any religious functions, and multiplied their domiciliary inspections.

Father Thomas was first on the list of those whose zeal made them abhorrent to the authorities. Three times the Hôtel Blin was ransacked by skilfully planned visitations, and on the third occasion Father Thomas had a very narrow escape.

One of the members of the search party caught sight of him disappearing up a ladder leading to a hay-loft. With an exultant cry of "I have caught my bird," he precipitated himself upon the ladder. At that moment, however, he dropped the lantern he was carrying, and as he was groping about to recover it, Father Thomas, profiting by the confusion and the darkness, leaped over the stooping body of his pursuer and got safely away. But the rage of the persecutors was redoubled by this failure, and it became clearly impossible for the zealous missionary to remain any longer at Amiens. Mère Julie and Mlle. Blin determined to accompany him in his flight. It was not easy to decide upon their destination. Bourdon and Gézaincourt, in either of which places he would have been a welcome guest, were proposed but rejected as not offering sufficient security. Mlle. Josephine Doria, hearing of their difficulty, offered them a refuge in her country house at Betten-court, a little village about twenty miles away, and

they left Amiens on June 16, 1799, in the late evening.

Shortly after their arrival at Bettencourt Julie became seriously ill and Frances had to be isolated with an attack of smallpox. The splendid constitution of Frances triumphed over her illness, however, and by the time she was convalescent a notable improvement had taken place in the condition of Julie's nervous system. She was now able to exchange her bed for an invalid chair, and she recovered the use of her speech, of which, say the *Memoirs of Mère St. Joseph*, she had more need than ever for giving instructions.

Father Thomas and his two assistants took up immediately in Bettencourt the same works of zeal to which they had devoted themselves in Amiens. In a few months their disinterested charity won the hearts of the simple villagers and changed the entire aspect of the place. Napoleon, understanding that to win over the mass of the people he must show himself a supporter of religion, made effective the law which, nominally indeed, granted freedom to the public exercise of Catholic worship, but which had too often been successfully frustrated, and in 1801 he legalised it quite definitely by the famous Concordat. The Organic Articles had not yet unmasked the evasive policy of the First Consul, and the pious inhabitants of the château of Bettencourt shared in the general rejoicing of the Catholics of France. In that little village the memory of Julie and of Frances is still held in veneration. When the preliminary examination of witnesses was carried out at Amiens for the Beatification of Julie Billiart, the Abbé Saunier, who had been parish priest at Bettencourt from 1832 to 1860, declared that if the Christian spirit had been preserved strong and vigorous in his parish, the fact

must be attributed to the "holy women from the château."

The presence of Father Thomas soon became an open secret. Priests and missionaries subject to the same kind of persecution as himself, came to him for encouragement, while laymen of distinction sought his advice in the difficult situations which so often arose. All who thus approached him went away with the highest esteem for his prudence and charity.

Amongst these visitors was an indefatigable promoter of many good works named Father Varin. This zealous priest returned to Paris in 1800, as Superior of the Fathers of the Faith, to treat of matters concerning the interests of his order. When he saw the activities of the holy paralytic and her noble friend he was immediately struck by the magnificent resources for good which the Church possessed in them. He spoke to them in his vigorous way of the dangers which lay before France on account of the lack of religious instruction, of the gaps made in the ranks of the religious teaching orders, of the need for generous and devoted volunteers for this necessary work.

Needless to say, his words met with sympathetic hearing. The teaching of the Catechism had been the work dearest to the heart of Julie Billiart from her youth, when she had been wont to gather the children together for that purpose in the fields, or later, round her bed of suffering at Cuvilly; and her companion shared with her this passion for the teaching of the truth. Father Varin visited Bettencourt several times. The more intimately he grew to know Julie the more deeply was he convinced that, in spite of the disabilities resulting from her paralysis, she was destined to labour for God in a wider field. He suggested to her the

establishment of a congregation which should perpetuate her work and procure religious instruction for the poorer classes according to her method and in her spirit.

Neither he nor Julie herself saw at the moment any possibility of carrying the suggestion into effect, but the project appealed strongly to the apostolic hearts both of Julie and of Frances, and though the interview at Bettencourt did not result in any immediate action, the seed had been sown which was later to bear such abundant fruit. Father Varin always looked back with joy and thanksgiving to his meeting with Father Thomas and his two fellow-labourers. While, however, he had felt no hesitation in his direction of Julie, he did not show the same assurance in regard to her companion. In concert with Mme. Barat, Father Varin was at this time engaged in laying the foundations of the Congregation of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart. By birth, by education and by rank, Mlle. Blin seemed to him a very apt subject for this Society, which was destined to devote itself to the education of the upper classes; her fortune, even, seemed providential in view of the needs of the newly-established Institute.

Frances, herself, however, showed no indecision. It was quite clear to her that she was called to devote herself to the poor, and she elected to stay with Julie and to associate herself irrevocably with her work.

In February 1803 the days of persecution came to an end, and not without regret the exiles retraced their steps to Amiens. They carried in their hearts the happiest memories of Bettencourt. Their work there had been productive of much fruit, there they had rejoiced over the freedom won for the Church

by the Concordat; and there they had met with Father Varin, who was afterwards to prove so steadfast a friend, and who had pointed out to them the whitening cornfields in which they were called to labour for the Lord of the Harvest.

CHAPTER IX

FOUNDATION OF THE INSTITUTE

THE promulgation of the Concordat was like the dawning of a second spring over a frost-bound France. Amiens, the capital of the Province of Picardy, was one of the first towns to throw off her winter sleep. As soon as religious liberty was proclaimed, the Carmelites, who had been already gathered together secretly by their saintly prioress, resumed openly their cloistered life, while in 1802 the Poor Clares, who also had been dispersed by the Revolution, received official sanction to reorganise their Community.

But there was one pressing need which these contemplative nuns were unable to supply. During the eight or nine years which had passed since the storm of the Revolution had burst over France, education had been almost entirely neglected, and a generation was growing up in ignorance. Here and there, as Taine points out, with the connivance of the local authorities, a priest or two who had returned from exile would be found furtively gathering together a few Catholic boys, or an Ursuline nun in secular disguise would teach a group of little girls to read and write in the seclusion of a back room, but the need of providing moral and intellectual training for the masses was urgent.

In the autumn of 1801 the Fathers of the Faith had opened a College for boys in Amiens. Their Superior,

Father Varin, was anxious that a similar opportunity should be provided for girls. His plans were seconded by Madame Barat and some of her friends ; the result being the foundation of the society known as the Ladies of the Sacred Heart.

While these measures were being set on foot, Father Thomas was unexpectedly recalled to Amiens, and his return decided that of his companions in exile. The question of a lodging was not settled without difficulty. The little suite of rooms at the Hôtel Blin was no longer at their disposition, and all they could find was a tiny house with no garden, inconveniently situated in the rue du Puits à Brandil. The change from the country air of Bettencourt told unfavourably on Julie's health, but she took up her work of instruction in gallant disregard of her weakness. Every day Mlle. Blin brought to her bedside a group of children who were won by her gentle and affectionate manner, and who, once they had listened to Julie's instructions, needed no persuasions to return.

Father Thomas did not abandon the tiny community. Every day he came to say Mass in a little room adjoining Julie's bedroom, and the two friends received Holy Communion from his hands.

Full of admiration for the persevering zeal which he realised could only be the fruit of heroic virtue, Father Thomas spoke to his colleagues of Julie and her work. The Fathers, whose interest was aroused by his words, under pretext of encouraging the children, contrived to be present occasionally at her instructions, and were not slow to realise what a powerful ally she would make in their reconquest of France for Christ.

When Mgr. de Villaret, the then Bishop of Amiens, set to work to reorganise his diocese, one of his first steps was to establish Catechism classes, and

naturally he too appreciated very highly the co-operation of Julie and Frances, and gave them, as long as he occupied the see of Amiens, unequivocal proofs of his encouragement and support.

Once more, at this juncture, the voice of God spoke to Julie through Father Varin, and bade her undertake a step which human reason would regard as impossible of accomplishment. This holy priest had already counselled, he now commanded her to found a religious Institute and to pray that God would provide subjects. "You must pray," he said, "for persons of right judgment and goodwill, without regard to riches or nobility of birth. It is the apostolic spirit, not worldly endowments, which God will bless."

And Julie, by whom an order from established authority was regarded as a manifestation of God's Will, obeyed. After an interval of ten years the vision of Compiègne was fulfilled, and the Institute of Notre Dame was founded at the foot of the Cross.

In August 1803 the little house which had sheltered the two friends was exchanged for a more commodious dwelling, formerly an orphanage, in the rue Neuve. Once more we note the contrast between God's ways and man's. The works of man are an erection, the works of God a growth, hence the former are disproportionately elaborate in conception and execution, the latter disproportionately simple. Who that was inexperienced in the Divine ways of working could have looked for a successful development of the plan conceived by Father Varin; would he indeed have ventured upon his suggestion without some definite inspiration from God? Here was an invalid who for thirty years had been chained to her couch, and he urges her to undertake such labours of organisation as would be enough to undermine the strength of a person



Blessed Julie Billiart.

Library
St. Francis Convent

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by Julie in accordance with the rule of the Institute of Mary, which had been drawn up in 1797 for a group of ladies in Rome. Its application to Julie's Institute was, of course, merely tentative, and it was intended to be modified in accordance with the needs of the newly-formed Society, but it served to introduce uniformity and religious regularity from the beginning.

The Catechism classes went on vigorously, and many teachers from the town sent their pupils to Mère Julie's lessons, while in the evening she devoted herself to the instruction of adults. Occasionally Father Varin himself presided at these gatherings, and noted with gratification Julie's wonderful power of making her instructions as interesting as they were useful.

Pope Pius VII proclaimed a Jubilee in thanksgiving for the restoration of public worship in France, and in connection with this a general mission was organised in Amiens, the preaching of which was entrusted to the Fathers of the Faith. The mission opened on April 29, 1804, in the five parishes simultaneously, and closed on May 24.

The Sisters of Notre Dame were called into collaboration and devoted themselves during the three weeks of the Mission to the instruction of the women and girls and to preparing them for the Sacraments. The priest missionaries gave unequivocal testimony to the value of their assistance by begging a renewal of it in the succeeding missions of St. Valery and Abbeville.

Among the missionaries was a certain Father Enfantin, a man of zeal and intense faith. He realised that the work already accomplished by Julie would be multiplied a hundredfold if she were restored to full health. Such a restoration implied a miracle, but Father

Enfantin did not fear to ask for a miracle when God's glory was at stake. Without disclosing the object of his petition he came to Julie after the close of the mission and asked her to join him in a Novena to the Sacred Heart for a person in whom he was interested. Julie readily gave her promise, and prayed earnestly for the unknown intention. On the following Friday Father Enfantin approached her. "Mother," he said, "if you have any faith, take one step in honour of the Sacred Heart." Julie rose and took a step, then a second and a third. She was cured. Her long trial had accomplished its task and now it was removed. Father Enfantin put her self-control to the severe test of binding her to tell no one of her cure, save Father Thomas, until the close of the Novena. His joy, and that of the Sisters, when Julie after Mass walked into the refectory intoning the *Te Deum*, may be imagined.

The first use she made of her recovered strength was to go, at the urgent pleading of the Fathers, to labour with them at the general missions at St. Valery in June and at Abbeville in July.

During her absence Frances acted as Superior of the Community, carried on the children's Catechism classes and trained the novices. It would have been difficult indeed to find a novice mistress better equipped for her task. The keynote of Mlle. Blin's life was self-abnegation, and her example was more impressive than her words in inculcating the practice of the religious rule. Her submission and her devotedness to Mère Julie knew no bounds, while Julie regarded her as the eldest daughter of the family of Notre Dame and trained her to be the model of all those who should come after her. Sure of the genuineness of her virtue and of the solid foundations of principle on which it was based, this experienced guide of souls had no need

to adopt in the case of Mlle. Blin any of those diplomatic precautions which might be advisable in dealing with souls of inferior calibre. The frank straightforwardness which was dear to the simplicity of Julie's character marked all their intercourse, while their mutual understanding was so perfect and the detachment and singleness of intention on either side so genuine that as religious superior and subject their relations were as nearly as possible ideal.

Julie, it must be remembered, had not accepted the office of Superior from personal ambition but in obedience to a manifest indication of the Will of God. She had the true humility which accepted the responsibility of rule and exercised it without self-consciousness, recognising that the submission she claimed was due not to her personality but to her office.

On her side, Mlle. Blin practised a self-suppression which was heroic. Her confessor obliged her during some time to keep a record of her meditations, and her spiritual note-books bear witness to the unremitting war she waged against her pride, her self-esteem, her very natural instinct for self-assertion. She records a resolution never to give her opinion to Mère Julie without a definite assurance that it is desired, and then only with great deference and respect. She determines not to excuse herself and not to shrink from blame or avoid it by means of those explanations of her action which she is naturally tempted to give.

From the beginning Father Thomas and Father Varin had recognised her as Foundress equally with Mère Julie. She took every opportunity of disseminating the view that Mère Julie was the real Foundress of the Institute and that her own share in the work was merely that of temporal benefactress. In her Memoirs, too, she endeavours to make their

relative positions clear by stating that "Mère Julie almost always consulted Mère Blin out of humility and Christian prudence; she regarded her as her fellow-worker and friend, and they were closely united in heart and soul."

A very little consideration suffices to show that the path of Frances was literally sown with occasions of sacrifice. Not to speak of the mere material discomforts of dress, food and lodging to one who had been delicately nurtured, there is evidence that she found her surroundings trying in many ways. She had been accustomed to the society of those of her own age and of her elders, she had enjoyed and appreciated the intellectual conversation and the cultured manner of her own family and of her guests. Now, however, she found herself amongst a group of young persons who, however excellent their dispositions and however fervent their desires of perfection, must frequently have been uncongenial to her from their narrower mental outlook and even by their very exuberance. A passage such as the following from her spiritual notes suggests to what a high degree of self-conquest she had attained: "Uncultivated manners, awkwardness, stupidity, the ridiculous behaviour and tactlessness of people arouse in me impatience and contempt. What a commotion is set up in my heart! If anything clashes with my taste or my views, I can scarcely hold my tongue about it. O my God, tear me away from myself. I will wage a continual warfare, until I succeed in separating myself from the life of the senses."

The resolution was forthwith put into practice. Her contemporaries declare that she was ingenious in finding ways of lacking even necessities, and seeking privations, suffering and humiliation.

She was the first to begin work, the last to leave it.

She regarded no occupation as beneath her : washing up, cooking, cleaning, she devoted herself to all these humble employments as earnestly as if she found a natural satisfaction in them.

These early days of struggle were often marked by wonderful interventions of Providence. Mère St. Joseph testifies that the prayers of Mère Julie seemed to be all-powerful. Frequently their slender resources, insufficient even for one day, would last on and on in a way that recalled the multiplication of the loaves, or the oil and meal of the widow of Sarepta.

In giving this testimony Mère St. Joseph was speaking from personal experience. Her fervour and her capacity had led to her being entrusted with all the important administrative posts : she was at once housekeeper, cellarer, sacristan, schoolmistress and assistant Superior, and was constantly in a position to note with gratitude how Providence came to the assistance of their poverty. The result was an unalterable confidence and calm which enabled her to face with equanimity all the threats of extinction which were levelled at the Institute in later years. The suspicion with which the new organisation was regarded by the political authorities, added to the extreme disproportion between their needs and their resources, had made it impossible up to the present to introduce a uniform religious dress. The postulants' dresses were all dyed violet and were distributed indifferently with a result which can be imagined. When it was necessary to go out the Sisters wore a fairly large black mantle of common woollen material. A white goffered cap covered the head and was tied under the chin. It was practically the costume of the peasants of Picardy.

In this guise, with an enormous basket of provisions

over her arm, Frances would accompany Mère Julie to the public market, with a lighter heart than she had often borne when she traversed the same streets of old in one of the elegant family carriages of the Blins. Her family, however, did not share her freedom from convention. They would beg her with tears in their eyes to modify her manner of life. But Frances resisted them with so much sweetness, and was so radiantly happy that, in the end, she carried her point triumphantly.

In the community too the humblest positions and the meanest offices were the object of her choice. She would cast herself before the Sisters, kissing their feet and begging their prayers on her behalf, she would take her frugal meal on her knees in the middle of the refectory, would accuse herself with real regret of her least negligences or faults, and would accept with perfect humility the rebukes she received from her Superior.

Mère Julie profited by such occasions to infuse a true religious spirit into her little flock. "We must have," she would say, "for our Institute souls of vigorous temper, and of calm and persevering energy, souls at once holy and courageous who will not flinch in the face of any obstacle, but who will forget themselves completely and spend themselves unreservedly for the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour."

Mère St. Joseph, when over eighty years old, would still recall with gratitude the days of her religious formation in the hands of Julie. Speaking to the Sisters she would remind them that Mère Julie expected her spiritual daughters to find their happiness in the Cross, their rest in humiliation and contempt; to remember that they had not come into religion to

seek their own ease and pleasure, but to find their happiness in sacrificing themselves for the glory of God and the service of souls, and to put off self in order to clothe themselves anew with Christ.

In Frances Julie found a soul magnanimous enough to appreciate her virile teaching, a character at once strong and lovable and a model for all future Sisters of Notre Dame.

Gradually, under the strong and wise direction of Julie, the convent of the rue Neuve took on the characteristics which were afterwards to mark the houses of Notre Dame. The provisional rule of life was gradually modified and amplified to suit the necessities of the developing congregation, and the holy example of Mère Julie and her companion bore fruit in drawing to it numerous vocations.

It was judged that the time had come to define more precisely the rules and Constitutions of the Institute. In this work Mère Julie had the assistance of the training and experience of Father Varin, and this first draft was carried out with so much foresight and wisdom that it comprised all the essential features of the rule as it was later drawn up in detail.

Three main principles were established as fundamental. The end of the Institute was to procure religious instruction for the young, and particularly for the poor, there was to be no distinction of choir and lay sister in the community, and lastly the Congregation was to be governed by a Mother General to whom every member should have access. The Sisters were further assured that the means of personal perfection would be placed within their reach in accordance with their religious vows and the duties of their state.

On July 2, 1805, the Constitutions were adopted

by the Community, and three months of trial showed that they were admirably suited to the mode of life of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

On the Feast of St. Teresa following, therefore, Julie Billiart, Frances Blin de Bourdon, Victoire Leleu and Justine Garson bound themselves by vow to observe the rule which had been given to them, and, in order to make their breach with the world complete, they suppressed their worldly names. Mère Julie took the name of Sister St. Ignatius, Frances that of Sister St. Joseph, while the other two were henceforth known as Sister Anastasie and Sister St. John respectively.

One can imagine what deep emotion filled the heart of the Co-foundress when the Church thus set the seal of episcopal approval on the infant organisation. To this moment they had been led by dim-lit ways, following the glimmering indications of God's will, not seeing the end of the road, but only the step they were called upon to take. But by their daily fidelity God was working out His own great project. Surely, as they knelt before the altar and cast a glance over the years, they must have found great cause for thankfulness and trust: surely the words must have rung in their ears, "To them that love God, all things work together unto good."

The next day, the election of a Superior General put the supreme authority into the hands of Julie, while Mère St. Joseph continued to exercise her office of Assistant. The newly-consecrated Bishop of Amiens, Monseigneur Demandolx, seemed to inherit the goodwill of his predecessor towards the newly founded Institute. He gave his whole-hearted approval to its statutes and wished even to append to them his episcopal seal.

“ Paul planteth, Apollo watereth, but God giveth the increase.” We have seen the seed cast into the furrow by these two great-hearted women ; it remains for us to show how carefully they tended the seedling and to record how God blessed their labours by its manifold increase.

CHAPTER X

EXTENSION OF THE WORK

THE suppression by the French Government of the public Missions, while it closed one channel to the zeal of Julie and Frances, caused the stream to flow the more strongly in the other. Their full energies were now concentrated on educational work. Their Catechism classes, as we have seen, had hitherto been frequented by children from various schools in Amiens, whose secular education was otherwise provided for,—in the case, however, of the orphan girls, whose care had been entirely committed to the Sisters, it was necessary to add to religious instruction sufficient training in the secular branches of study to equip them for the duties of their state of life. Lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic and sewing were accordingly provided for them, and in this portion of the work the education of Frances was the chief asset of the young Community.

All the training of her early years and all the experience of her maturity were laid under contribution, not only in her care of the orphans, but more especially in her guidance of their young mistresses.

Brought up as she had been almost exclusively with her elders, Frances was not naturally drawn to the society of the young. In this she was a contrast to Julie, who from her earliest years had been endowed with a wonderful love for children, and a power of winning their love, so that wherever she appeared the

little ones would gather round her. And thus it would seem that in the diversity of gifts of the Co-foundresses was already foreshadowed the twofold work of the Congregation—the teaching of children and the training of teachers.

At this period, however, there were but few Sisters and these were still unformed and inexperienced. In consequence, Mère Julie was obliged to disregard the natural preferences of her companion and to commit to her the superintendence of the children.

It often happens that an occupation in prospect distasteful is found in practice not only to be less arduous than imagination pictured it, but also to develop unsuspected potentialities, and so, while the charge of the orphans brought to Frances many an occasion for the exercise of patience and self-control, it also developed a latent power of dealing with the young, which had lain dormant merely through the accident of circumstance.

The Memoirs of Mère St. Joseph furnish many an interesting proof of this to those who can read between the lines.

An orphan child of about twelve years named Madeleine was discharged from one of the hospitals in an advanced stage of consumption. She was absolutely untaught, but, in spite of neglect, she had remained simple and innocent. Mère St. Joseph undertook the care of the little one, and with infinite patience began to instruct her in the rudiments of the only science she was ever likely to need. The child's progress was remarkable, and she showed her dawning intelligence in the matter of religion by continual questions. Her dispositions were a source of edification to the whole house, and after a short period of instruction she was allowed to make her first Communion. It proved to be her Viaticum—within a

few days the innocent soul had taken flight to Heaven.

It is clear from the account which Mère St. Joseph gives of this death, that she was deeply moved by it, and that the consolation of feeling that God had used her as His instrument for the salvation of the little sufferer gave her courage to devote herself to a work from which she naturally shrank as uncongenial.

A greater trial awaited her patience. "I have been told," she writes, "to have little Firmine with me, to keep her busy and to look after her. The charge rouses something of a rebellion in me, I foresee many sacrifices, but I hope that grace will sweeten them."

Firmine was another orphan who had been received by the Sisters through the influence of a prominent family of Amiens. She seems to have been an interesting child, charming in appearance, sensitive and precocious. As petulant as she was quick-witted, and an irrepressible chatterbox, she was calculated to be something of a disturbing element in the Convent peace. Mère Blin, serious by nature and education, had little sympathy with the child's irresponsible giddiness, and her presentiments proved to be all too well founded.

"I foresaw pretty clearly that Firmine would be a subject of sacrifice for me," she writes in her notes on her meditation. She feels evidently that the union with God she is seeking after is not rendered any easier by the distraction of her little charge. "God gives me grace to understand," she adds, however, "that true union with Him is brought about by the accomplishment of His holy Will."

Poor little Firmine figures more than once in the subsequent pages of Mère St. Joseph's spiritual notes. "I had a temptation in regard to Firmine. I had

gained a little degree of recollection which had need of solitude and silence—but it is all gone.”

“ I have had a wretched day,” says a later note—“ no great faults, but a lack of recollection all day long, and little bursts of merely natural impulse. O Firmine, Firmine, you are accountable for some of it.”

Fortunately, however, the judgment of Frances was sound enough to recognise that a little of God’s Will is worth a great deal of self-secured and self-gratifying interior calm. “ I see and feel, in spite of the efforts of the devil, that the Will of God being our whole good, I can profit by the difficulties which Firmine procures for me, since these circumstances are the Will of God for me ! ”

She was, too, sufficiently grounded in virtue to be able to master her natural disinclination, and to put her whole heart into the task assigned by obedience. Her influence was solid and lasting, and many of the children who came under it subsequently devoted their lives to God’s service under the banner of Notre Dame.

The experience of two years made it evident to the Foundresses that the training of the children who attended the Catechism classes would be more thorough if their intercourse with their mistresses were more sustained. With the counsel of competent authorities, therefore, they decided to open a school, and Mgr. Demandolx offered the Sisters a more commodious house than the one they were occupying in the rue Neuve. It was not perfectly suitable for their requirements, and the rent of 1000 francs was considered high in comparison with their resources, but Julie accepted the offer, chiefly out of deference to the Bishop.

And so, in August 1806, the Sisters left the rue

Neuve for the Faubourg Noyon. There was no feeling of elation about the migration to the new surroundings, for a very strong attachment bound them to the cradle of their Institute, the scene of their first sacrifices with their accompanying joys, and above all of the miraculous cure of their spiritual Mother.

The blessing of God followed them to the new establishment, and in less than a year the number of Sisters had been more than doubled, reaching a total of thirty-seven.

Mme. Franssu, of whom we have heard as a school friend of Frances, with a former religious, named Sister Martha, who had been driven from her convent at the time of the Revolution, were allowed to live in the new convent, and Mme. Franssu gave the Sisters unequivocal testimony of her goodwill and of her desire to help them.

No sooner were they settled in their new home than the first day-school of Notre Dame was opened. There was no elaborate prospectus issued. The keynote of Julie's methods was simplicity, and the poor, for whom her school was intended, were easily accessible. A novice, attended by a girl of about fifteen years of age, was sent out, bell in hand, to announce in the neighbouring streets, "The Sisters of Notre Dame are opening a free school for little girls; go and tell your mothers." The news soon spread, and at the opening meeting no less than sixty pupils were present, a number which, as time went on, steadily increased.

Thus a very definite step forward was made in the work of the Institute, and the heart of Julie was filled with joy and enthusiasm. As she passed from class to class, "My dear good children," she would say to the mistresses, "when I see you there in the midst

of your poor little ones, I think you are greater than all the potentates in the world."

If these early days were days of great consolation, they were also days of unremitting labour. In addition to the general direction of the Community, Julie undertook all the business necessary to settle the enterprise on a secure foundation, while to Mère St. Joseph she entrusted the difficult and responsible task of forming the mistresses. The postulants who offered themselves were full of goodwill, but, as was not astonishing considering the troublous times through which France had been passing, their qualifications left much to be desired from the intellectual point of view.

Grammar, spelling, arithmetic, even these simple requirements were at times remarkable rather for originality than for conformity to the recognised standards, and whenever the Sisters were free from their class duties, they became pupils in their turn. Thus did Mère St. Joseph initiate the second branch of the growing Institute, that of the training of teachers. Her own education had been thorough and comprehensive, her intellect was keen, clear, logical. Moreover, the influence of her example was beneficial in every way to the young Sisters, offering as it did the example of an ideal mistress.

The methods of instruction and of teaching practice were simple, the equipment primitive. The young Sisters would train themselves in clear enunciation by practice in the garden or in the attics; the lack of blackboards was frequently supplied by the wooden floor, a practice by which mortification must have gained equally with poverty. But sacrifice and gaiety are always playfellows, and the earnestness and zeal of these first members of the Institute was their glorious contribution to its traditions.

Father Thomas and Father Enfantin, the former

especially, were assiduous in their help. During the first year or two, in addition to the spiritual instructions they gave the Community, these holy priests devoted many precious hours to preparing the young Sisters for their scholastic duties, conducting courses of lessons in grammar, Bible history and various other subjects necessary for their work.

It was with a memory that recalled the laborious efforts and the merry expedients of these early days, that in formulating the rule some fifteen years later, Mère St. Joseph wrote the beautiful article on charity which reminds the Sisters that "all must, with great charity, agree together, help one another, and relieve one another as Sisters."

"The spirit of the Sisters of Notre Dame," says the rule elsewhere, "is a spirit of simplicity, obedience and charity." Mère Julie realised perfectly that a spirit of humble obedience was more essential to the accomplishment of the work of education than much learning. She would occasionally interrupt their studies by summoning mistresses and pupils alike into the garden to take their share in a caterpillar hunt in the cabbage-beds or a weeding contest among the lettuces. The interruption can scarcely have been welcome, but there is no doubt that its discipline was profitable. In speaking of these restraints of the religious life which fettered her liberty in all directions, Mère St. Joseph confessed that they had constituted a "martyrdom by pinpricks." But she recognised that the resulting gain in spiritual energy and strength of will was worth the cost.

Few things were more calculated to give her pleasure than to see the capacities of the young Sisters developing under her training, yet she never hesitated to withhold from intellectual work those for whose progress in virtue she deemed it inexpedient.

“God will accomplish His designs by means of humble souls of mediocre talents, but His work would be compromised if it were entrusted to imperfect religious; pride and self-sufficiency are the greatest obstacles to the success of any work which touches souls directly.”

In these views she was at one with Mère Julie, who encouraged and helped her in every way. When they were together they shared the responsibility, when Julie was called elsewhere by duty she gave Mère St. Joseph the support of her affectionate letters. In December 1806 Julie wrote to her companion: “I place you in the adorable Heart of our good Saviour, my dear good Sister Blin, that He may give you all the graces which are necessary for the watchfulness He asks from you, for the boundless charity necessary to bear with those characteristics which repel you the most, in subjects who are still unformed.”

On another occasion she cheers her in the discouragement incident to the slowness of progress made by the Sisters in spelling. “I know it is not at all satisfactory, but patience, all will be well with the help of God. . . . One does not see as much progress as one would like, but I assure you, it is being made all the same.”

When Mère Julie in her journeys noted anything which promised to be helpful, she would write and tell Mère Blin about it. So, on her visit to Bordeaux, she notes the excellence of the discipline in the large poor school, and takes occasion to remind the Sisters never to raise their voices unduly. “It may be difficult in the beginning,” she says, “but remember, everything depends on the beginnings.”

The perfect unity of spirit which existed between the Foundresses, differing as they did widely in character, was a source of great strength to the growing

Congregation; no clash of opinion ever existed between them, and Mère Blin held herself in complete dependence on Mère Julie.

The rapid extension of the school in the Faubourg Noyon attracted the attention of many parish priests and even of bishops, with the result that appeals came from various quarters for mistresses formed under the watchful eye of Mère Blin.

On June 19, 1806, the French Government gave its approval to the Statutes of the "Sisters of Notre Dame, constituted into a religious teaching body." And the confirmation of the Emperor was secured on March 10, 1807, at the camp of Osterode.

"We were provisionally approved," say the Memoirs of Mère St. Joseph, "and that was all that was necessary to enable us to employ the goodwill of our Sisters in the instruction of youth."

The Bishop of Ghent, Mgr. Fallot de Beaumont, secured for his diocese the first secondary house, that of St. Nicolas, founded in December 1806. This was the first Belgian foundation; by this slender channel flowing towards Flanders the entire stream was one day to branch off.

Belgium upheld her reputation for hospitality in the welcome she offered to the daughters of Mère Julie. In this land where the faith was strong the Sisters had the happiness of wearing in public the religious habit, fashioned after the model which had been shown to the Foundress in her vision at Compiègne. The habit was blessed by the Bishop before being assumed by the nuns. Julie writes playfully to her children at Amiens: "My dear children, we all look charming in our little costume, we are as much at home in it as if we had never worn anything else: we had the happiness of receiving the habit at the hands of his Lordship the Bishop. Our Sisters have

been well received everywhere, and people are pleased to see them in their costume."

Namur, following in the wake of Flanders, next claimed a religious school for girls. The Bishop of Amiens favoured the project and on his own initiative designated Mère Blin to direct the new foundation. Belgium recognised and appreciated the value of the gift thus made to them, but no one suspected at the time that Namur would later take the place of Amiens. In France, too, new foundations were asked for, and the school of the Sisters of Notre Dame, opened at Montdidier February 21, 1807, was followed by that of Rubempré in the following year. Scarcely had the house of Namur been firmly established than Mère Julie received an application for help from a convent of nuns in Bordeaux.

These Sisters were a branch of an order founded in the seventeenth century by Blessed Jeanne de Lestonnac. They were known in the district as Sisters of Notre Dame, and their aim was the same as that of Julie's sisters, the instruction of the poor children of the town.

With the approval of the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Mère Julie visited these ladies and affiliated them to the Amiens Community. From Namur Mère St. Joseph wrote a delightful letter of welcome to the new Sisters. "Tell Mlle. Vincent and her daughters, I beg of you, that there are at Namur two Sisters who rejoice to contract a spiritual alliance with them. The more the family grows, the more I shall rejoice, since we are all united for the sole purpose of serving our Heavenly Father better."

The first fruit of this affiliation was the opening of a second school in one of the populous suburbs of Bordeaux. The children flocked to it at once, and Julie's zeal grew with their numbers. "Have you

got more children in your poor schools?" she wrote. "Since I saw such large numbers at Bordeaux, I should like to go all over the world to snatch these poor little creatures from the devil and teach them the value of their souls."

On May 21, 1808, a foundation was asked for at Jumet, in the colliery district of Charleroi. Its beginnings were on a very modest scale; the annals of the house assure us that Lady Poverty was long the mistress of matters financial. Little by little, however, the establishment grew in influence.

Many of its boarders became afterwards members of the Institute, and the title of Mother General was more than once borne by Sisters who had passed part of their scholastic or their religious life at Jumet.

The development of the characteristic spirit of the Institute went on side by side with its exterior growth. The direction of Mère Julie and the training of Mère St. Joseph produced in their subjects a type of religious distinguished by a virile temper of soul and an unquestioning obedience which had in it something of the heroic.

One day when Mère Julie had just reached home after a temporary absence, she met a young Sister coming out of class and sent her to put on her cloak. Without a word, the Sister went away and got ready to leave. "That is very often the way we take our departure," say the Memoirs of Mère St. Joseph; "it is very rare that one gets a long notice. Leaving the Mother house is like dying, one must be ready at any time."

When Mère Julie founded a house, it was her custom to accompany the Sisters herself. She used to stay a week or a fortnight, or even longer, with the new Community to see everything well established and regulated according to the spirit of the Institute.

When she left she expected the Superiors to send her detailed accounts of their stewardship, of the work of the mistresses, of their success and the number of children in the schools.

The great anxiety of both the Foundresses was to train their subjects to strength of character and sanity of judgment. And the blessing of God rested on the labours of the Sisters. Vocations increased, and the number of the children in the schools grew ever larger, while the Cross was not wanting to assure fruitfulness to all their undertakings.

The day was about to dawn when the new Institute should be tried by that greatest of all trials, the opposition of the good. The heroic virtue of Julie and of her companion was never better proved than in the storm which was about to break over their enterprise and which would have wrecked it had it not come from God.

CHAPTER XI

TRIAL AND CONTRADICTION

“EVERY branch which beareth fruit He will prune that it may bring forth more fruit,” said Our Lord to His apostles. And so it would seem that those who are chosen to do great work for Him must be purified in the fire of tribulation, until every trace of self is burnt away, that in their very zeal there may be absolute detachment.

The Foundresses of Notre Dame were not excepted from this familiar law of God’s action. The year 1808–1809 was the most critical in the history of their Institute, for it was in that year that they were put to a crucial test which was to decide whether their devotion to the glory of God was free from any admixture of self-love.

Looking back with the light of the subsequent development of the Institute to guide us, it is easy for us to under-estimate the heroic character of their virtue under the circumstances we are about to describe.

The instrument of the trial was a young priest, the Abbé de Sambucy, who was appointed Confessor and spiritual Superior of the Mother house at Amiens by the Bishop, Mgr. Demandolx. He was intellectually gifted, but he seems to have been incapable of grasping the spirit of the newly-formed Institute.

Julie and Frances both had sufficient breadth of vision to conceive the principles on which their work should be founded in order to admit of its extension.

They realised that it was not destined to be cramped within the limits of a single diocese or even of a single country, and that consequently its organisation must combine flexibility with unity of government.

M. de Sambucy seemed to confuse strength with rigidity and unity with narrowness. Was it, perhaps, through a lack of originality that he was unable to conceive of an Institute which, while retaining the spirit of the ancient monastic orders, should differ from them in external features? Possibly; and it would seem too that an overweening confidence in his own judgment led him to undervalue the views of those who had, under the inspiration of God, initiated the undertaking. Differing in this from Father Varin, and from Mgr. de Villaret, the former Bishop of Amiens, both of whom had approved the constitutions in outline, he considered that there should be no Superior General, no dependence of houses on the Mother house, no expansion outside the single diocese of Amiens.

He was, it would seem, unable to discriminate between the wielding of authority as a trust from God and the desire for personal aggrandisement. In Julie he only saw an ambitious and autocratic woman, and in consequence he systematically opposed her government, and with small-minded diplomacy kept furtive watch over her proceedings and undermined the esteem in which she was held by the Bishop.

The Memoirs of Mère St. Joseph are scrupulously charitable in their references to him, and give him always the credit of excellent intentions. "He was not the right man for the affair" was the very mild censure pronounced upon him by Mère Julie, when his misconceptions and spirit of irresponsible interference had turned her Mother house out of the land that gave it birth!

Mère St. Joseph was an obstacle in his path. She

was absolutely one with Mère Julie, and while it would have been difficult to destroy what the one had established in the house as long as the other held a position of authority in it, it was not easy to find a means of depriving her of that position. The Sisters, as was well known, were bound to her by ties of gratitude, and M. de Sambucy himself was full of respect for her social rank and her exalted virtue; he did not, however, feel that she would be particularly amenable to the modifications he purposed to introduce when he should have secured the removal of Mère Julie. "As long as Mère Blin is in the house," he used to say, "I can do nothing." In this conjecture he was correct. It remained, however, to be seen whether the reform he proposed was more in accordance with the Will of God than the original plan of the Foundresses for securing that each should contribute to the work according to the different gifts of Providence.

And so the two friends helped each other to bear the cross of contradiction, and Mère St. Joseph shared in the chalice of ignominy offered to Julie.

The distant rumblings of the storm had been heard ever since the foundation of the house at St. Nicolas in December 1806, to which M. de Sambucy had been opposed. Outwardly he did nothing, save to drop an occasional sinister criticism which poisoned the atmosphere; inwardly he nursed his project, and his determination grew until he undertook responsibilities from which a humbler soul would have shrunk. His position of confidence enabled him to impress his views upon the Bishop, to whom he represented Mère Julie as a proud and independent character aspiring to the Generalate to satisfy her personal ambition.

It was of course impossible to attribute a similar

attitude to Mère St. Joseph, who obviously had not sacrificed her social rank for the sake of dignity. But the would-be reformer recognised in her the invincible force of patience and self-mastery. She must be removed like a stone of stumbling from the path.

Such was the condition of affairs at Amiens at the moment when the promise made to the Bishop of Namur was on the point of execution. The choice of subjects for the new foundation had been settled, their posts allocated, even the date of their departure had been fixed.

Suddenly, two days before that date, M. de Sambucy arrived in haste with the announcement that his Lordship had appointed Mère Blin to be Superior at Namur.

The order was imperative. It was, moreover, autocratic, for it ignored the right which belongs to any Superior General to assign to her subjects the posts they should hold. It was a direct blow at the stability of the Institute, which depended much at this stage upon the co-operation of the Foundresses.

The Bishop's orders, furthermore, extended to Mère Julie herself. She was to accompany the Sisters to Namur, and after installing them in the new foundation, was to proceed to Bordeaux, where the house of Mme. Vincent, the Community newly aggregated to her Institute, was in need of her presence. There, she was given to understand, she was expected to remain indefinitely.

Both Mère Julie and Mère St. Joseph realised the import of these orders, but with supreme self-conquest they not only yielded to the will of the Bishop, but rendered their submission with such serenity that until the last moment the Community was unaware of the change of plan.

M. de Sambucy found it easier to do without the

person of Mère Blin de Bourdon than without her property. He induced her before her departure to give him power of attorney over her fortune, and thus secured it for the Amiens house.

Even this extraordinary degree of disinterestedness failed to open his eyes. Everything seemed to favour his plans—he had secured the removal of the two Foundresses, and, thanks to their discretion, the Community did not even know that their departure was virtually a dismissal.

Before Mère Julie and Mère St. Joseph had left the town, M. de Sambucy had arrogated to himself supreme authority over the bereaved Community. He arrived at the convent, represented himself as being invested with full powers by his Lordship, and had the Community bell rung to assemble the Sisters.

He redistributed some of the more important offices, modified the regulations, substituted the title of 'Madame' for the simple mode of address 'Sister' which had been customary, and finally committed the superiority to the hands of a young Sister of twenty-three years of age, whose complete confidence he had gained.

This young person had been but nineteen months in religion, and she was ill-fitted by birth and breeding for her new dignity. She had, it is true, a certain strength of character, and was capable, under judicious training, of developing into a worthy and useful religious, but she had neither the experience nor the virtue nor the prestige necessary for the post into which she was now thrust.

M. de Sambucy changed her name from that of Sister Thérèse to that of Mère Victoire: he announced to the assembled Sisters that the absence of the

Foundresses would be indefinitely prolonged, and safeguarded his plans by intercepting the correspondence between the absent Superiors and their subjects.

For three months all went smoothly, and the young Superior won golden opinions from all, both within and without the house. A young Sister who was sent away from Amiens to another field of labour gave unequivocal testimony to the spirit of fervour, of sacrifice and of regularity which animated the Community. "Our good Mother Superior is winning confidence and affection by her profound humility," she wrote. "She was quite upset by her appointment."

"And yet," comments Mère St. Joseph, "humility was not her strong point; how could she have been so suddenly transformed? Moreover, it would have been difficult for her to support without prejudice to herself the praises which were showered upon her."

Time, however, discriminates between the solid wood of true virtue and the veneer of superficial amiability. The pendulum of opinion soon swung as far in adverse criticism as it had swung in praise, the incompetence of the young Superior became a subject of discussion, and it was found necessary to recall the Foundress.

When Mère Julie returned to the Community, whose spirit was changed almost beyond recognition, she found her work had been completely undone, and set herself patiently to form her children anew to the practice of religious humility.

While "the young folk were governing the house at Amiens after the fashion of young folk," Mère St. Joseph was establishing on solid foundations the house

of Namur, whose destiny was so important in the history of the Congregation.

On leaving Amiens Mère Julie and Mère St. Joseph had made their way first to St. Nicolas, where they were to be joined by Sister Xavier. This valiant woman had been one of the pioneers of the Institute in Flanders. She was destined to be one of the foundation stones of the convents established in the district watered by the Sambre and the Meuse. Though her life was to ring all too soon to eventide, she was at this time a strong and indefatigable labourer in the vineyard, and was filled with joy at the prospect of working under the direction of Mère Blin.

On the evening of the 7th July, 1807, the three Sisters entered Namur in the lumbering old diligence by way of the Brussels gate. Their entrance into the city had nothing of the triumphal about it. If here and there a passer-by, struck by a certain incongruity between the distinction of their bearing and the poverty of their attire, turned to cast a second glance in their direction he did not proffer them any assistance. A little crowd of interested idlers gathered round them, perpetrating a few sorry jokes at their expense, and with this noisy and embarrassing escort they made their way to the Bishop's house.

There misunderstandings were at an end and the weary travellers met with a paternal hospitality which was an augury of what was to come. The Bishop, Mgr. Pisani de la Gaude, knew nothing of the Sisters who were presented to him by Mère Julie. It had been agreed that the worldly name of Mère Blin should not be disclosed and that she should be known simply by her religious name, Sister St. Joseph, or by her title, Sister Superior, since that was the office she was intended to fill, and the Bishop made no

attempt to discover the social position she had previously occupied. He entertained the Sisters at supper and then conducted them to the "Junior Seminary" which he had placed at their disposal. "We have been received by his Lordship," wrote Mère Julie on the following day, "with all sorts of kindness. . . . The Sisters are very happy, and bless God with all their hearts. They find the house excellent, not to say too good." Everywhere there was evidence of the good Bishop's solicitude for the Sisters who had come to devote themselves to his flock; "not so much as a match is lacking."

And his kindness struck the keynote of the relations which have ever since existed between the Bishops of Namur and the Congregation. Years have passed and names have changed, but the Institute of Notre Dame finds its support in this mutual trust and devotedness in these days as in those.

In proportion as the fate of the Mother Community at Amiens grew problematical, the little colony which had been so rudely detached from the land of its origin developed in stability, and when Mère Julie left the new foundation in accordance with her instructions to visit the newly-affiliated Community at Bordeaux, she left Mère St. Joseph without apprehension, settled in an environment in which she no longer felt herself a stranger.

On her side Mère St. Joseph confesses that she was depressed at the prospect of separation. She suffered at the thought of being invested with an authority she had always dreaded, and she suffered too at seeing Mère Julie set out alone, and at the uncertainty of the future. The day before Mère Julie's departure, however, these feelings of anxiety and distress were alleviated by one of those remarkable changes of



First House of the Sisters of Notre-Dame at Namur,
the "Petit Séminaire."

disposition which are operated directly by grace, and which are all the more complete because they are independent of any outward circumstance.

As her eyes rested on a picture representing the Descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, the cloud was suddenly lifted and her soul was filled with joy and confidence. Impulsively she said to Mère Julie, "Good-bye, ma Mère. You will come back to die at Namur."

In a letter written August 19 to Bordeaux, Mère St. Joseph again alludes to this interior assurance: "God, who is infinitely good, has allowed me to feel persuaded that you will come back here for a very long stay. Whether this is so or not, it is at least true that my weakness had need of the comfort that this hope has given me."

The departure of Mère Julie left the responsibility of organising the work of the new house to the initiative of Mère St. Joseph. Though she had shrunk from the task it was not one which was beyond her strength.

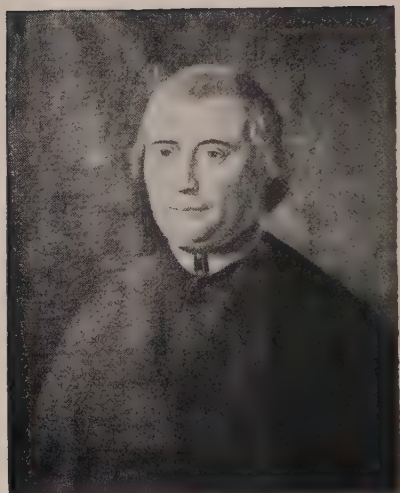
In addition to the primary school which was at once opened for the children of the town, a school for lace-making was begun for the elder girls, both of which undertakings are still in existence, though naturally the attendance at the primary school has enormously increased and the present building erected in the rue du Lombard has been called from its imposing exterior and the completeness of its equipment "le palais scolaire des pauvres." The workroom for sewing and lace-making is the means of safeguarding many of the girls after they have left school and of providing them with a means of livelihood.

In autumn 1807, Sister Anne Leroy, the Sister in charge of the lace-working school, fell into a long and painful decline. Mère St. Joseph deputed to no one

the charge of nursing the sufferer, but herself tended her, and shortly before she died, on February 18, 1808, granted her the privilege of making her vows. This, the first death in the Community, was a great loss, which was felt by no one more keenly than by the devoted Superior. Moreover, it was not easy to fill her place, and we find Mère St. Joseph wondering whether perhaps it is God's Will that the accommodation necessary for the lace-workers should be utilised instead for children in need of instruction. No decision was taken, however, until reference could be made to Mère Julie. And matters of still greater weight were then in the balance, for at Amiens things were approaching a crisis.

Towards the close of the month of March Sister Anastasie Leleu was sent to Jumet, where Mère St. Joseph met her to hear news from Amiens. The revelation of the true state of affairs came as a shock. But even at such a moment the noble principles upon which the two friends habitually guided their conduct sustained them. No word of recrimination escaped either one or the other. "My heart and my soul rest on God in the midst of all the fogs of the Somme," is the word of Julie. "Rejoice, be thrilled with joy," replies her valiant companion, "this is how the good God treats His friends. Be quite sure that matters will right themselves and that a way will be opened before you. Let us pray earnestly that God will make us do His holy Will—that is what I desire, nothing else is worth seeking for."

Such sentiments flow readily enough from the pen in time of tranquillity, but their spontaneous utterance under such circumstances argues a degree of habitual self-control and submission which can only be characterised as heroic.



M. Minsart.

That this disposition was not due to insensibility or to a merely partial realisation of the issues at stake, but to a victory of confidence in God over the keenest feeling, is proved by the fact that on her return from Jumet, Mère St. Joseph was completely prostrate and obliged to take to her bed. The Sisters attributed her illness to the asperities of the weather, and we have one more proof of the fortitude of this great soul in the silence which did not deceive them.

The situation was a difficult one, and after some consideration Mère St. Joseph decided to confide in the confessor of the convent, M. Minsart, upon whose kindness and goodwill she could rely. He decided that it would be wise to make known to the Bishop of Namur, Mgr. Pisani, a state of things which threatened the very existence of the new Institute.

Mgr. Pisani visited the convent and, encouraged by his paternal kindness, Mère St. Joseph gave him an indication of the troubles which overshadowed the house of Amiens. The result was to deepen the interest the Bishop already bore to the Congregation of Notre Dame. From this moment Namur took on the aspect of a safe harbour for the storm-tossed skiff of Blessed Julie.

Mère St. Joseph hastened to communicate to the Foundress the consoling news of Mgr. Pisani's attitude, and it would seem as though some premonition of the part that Namur was to play had been in Julie's mind for some weeks. In a letter written on March 20, 1808, she had said: "The good God permits that everything should turn your way. The authorities here are acting like the Egyptians who have done all in their power to drive out the Israelites from their country; they are pushing us towards you as much as they can."

The heart of the intrepid Foundress must have found comfort and support during these difficult days in the devoted attachment and the perfect understanding of Mère St. Joseph.

When Mère Julie spoke to her of the contradictions which awaited those who stood loyally by her, she replied: "It is quite true that we understand one another, whether we are separated or together; my heart responds to yours as to the inviolable attachment which unites us in God and which will last, I trust, as long as its Author."

And to the solidity of this attachment these other words bear witness: "It is not the pleasure of seeing you which makes me long for your visit;—thanks be to God, I have learned in your school to prefer the service of my Heavenly Father to all natural satisfactions. Come as soon as you can, the glory of God is at stake."

The two Foundresses, cut off for the time being from each other and from the intercourse which would have been so strong a mutual support, encouraged each other by their devotion to the Will of God. "Let us try above all not to separate ourselves from the Will of God; O, ma Mère, pray hard that He may enable us to know it and to carry it out." It is evident from these and similar passages that the uncertainty in which they were as to the designs of Providence was far more painful than the outward humiliation of which these difficult months were full. "A person who only wants what God wants is afraid of nothing," Mère St. Joseph would say.

And so once more, at this critical juncture, we note that characteristic patience in waiting for the manifestation of the Divine Will of which the lives of the Foundresses of Notre Dame offer such striking

examples. But their patience and their trust were to meet with their reward.

One day Mère Julie received an unexpected summons to the Bishop's house. When she entered, Mgr. Demandolx asked her with great kindness whether she was satisfied with the conditions of the Jumet foundation.

Mère Julie explained quite simply what the difficulties were under which the foundation was labouring: it was, as a matter of fact, only the charity of the Co-foundress which had kept it in existence, for it was she who had supplied from Namur the wants of the Sisters. In the course of this interview Mère Julie received from the Bishop permission to make a visitation of the Belgian Communities.

And thus it was that at Namur the two friends met again, and were able to concert their plans for the future in consideration of the developments of the past nine months.

A delicate financial question arose to make the situation still more complicated. It will be remembered that on leaving Amiens Mère St. Joseph had given power of attorney to M. de Sambucy over the administration of her property. In so doing, however, she had requested her family lawyer to notify her of any proposed changes before carrying them out. M. de Sambucy, however, who focussed all his attention on the improvements of the Amiens house, instructed the lawyer to sell a certain piece of property and directed him not to acquaint Mère St. Joseph with the fact until he should empower him to do so.

The property was put up for sale, and an opportunity of disposing of it at an advantage afforded the lawyer a chance of serving at the same time the interests of his client and of M. de Sambucy, but the secrecy

with which the transaction had been invested annoyed him; he notified Mère St. Joseph that "the bargain was concluded and the deed of possession signed, but payment had not yet been made," and begged her to dispose of the purchase money herself.

It was necessary for Mère St. Joseph to obtain leave to visit Amiens to complete this transaction, and in order to make the circumstances clear she was obliged to disclose her identity. Mgr. Pisani gave her leave of absence for a fortnight. She returned to Amiens with Mère Julie, leaving Sister Xavier, a young Sister of twenty-three, in charge of the house, and with no suspicion that she would not see Namur again for the space of ten months.

The travellers passed by St. Nicolas on their way to Amiens. On their arrival a crushing letter from Mgr. Demandolx was handed to them, which gave them a foretaste of the reception that awaited them. Had its terms been somewhat more moderate, it might have been described as a bull of excommunication.

Mère Julie, herself absolutely straight and simple, had no suspicion that she had been misrepresented to his Lordship. Her conscience brought no accusations against her, and so without losing her peace of soul she accepted this new humiliation as a lesson in detachment.

Having completed her business at St. Nicolas she set out for France with her companion, and reached Amiens on May 5, 1808. The rejoicing of the Sisters was complete when they found that Mère St. Joseph had returned with the Foundress.

On the very day of her arrival Mère St. Joseph sent word to Mgr. Demandolx notifying him of her presence in Amiens, and asking the favour of an audience. The Bishop was setting out in a day or

two for a two months' journey, and without realising the difficulty in which the arrangement placed Mère St. Joseph, he postponed the interview until after his return. It was necessary, therefore, to apply to the Bishop of Namur for an extension of leave of absence. This she received in a kind letter dated 7th June, 1808. "As I am accustomed to making sacrifices, my dear child, I submit to that of being deprived for some time longer of your presence, of the example of your virtue and the fruit of your charitable labour. . . . Take care of your health," he concluded, "come back to us as soon as possible, and bring with you, if it is allowable, your good Mother, to whom I send my affectionate greetings in the Lord."

To the consolation of Mgr. Pisani's fatherly and cordial letters was added that of an equally kind message of goodwill from the Archbishop of Bordeaux.

Separated from the house of Namur so unexpectedly and for so long a time, Mère St. Joseph nevertheless kept in close touch with the Community there. She instructed Sister Xavier to give her details of her administration with regard to both the Community and the children, and encouraged her by the confidence she placed in her judgment. "I am quite sure," she wrote, "all will go well." Sister Xavier overrated her physical strength and undertook to fast the whole of Lent; the result was an alarming loss of strength. Mère St. Joseph insisted on her giving the children a week's holiday and taking a complete rest. She obliged her to give an account of her health in every letter and showed the most maternal solicitude in her regard.

Meantime at Amiens Mère St. Joseph ranged herself definitely and loyally on the side of Mère Julie.

When Mgr. Demandolx returned from his journey he received Mère St. Joseph with courtesy, and with perfect frankness she gave him her judgment as to the trouble resulting from the interference of M. de Sambucy. The effect of this disclosure was frustrated by opposing influences in the Bishop's environment, and the disdain meted out to Mère St. Joseph at Amiens was as great as the esteem and kindness with which she was regarded at Namur. Her prolonged absence in Picardy was a source of displeasure to Mgr. Pisani, and she would undoubtedly have been summoned back to Namur had not the serious nature of the situation called for great circumspection. Mère Julie thought it was but natural that the income of Mère Blin should be utilised for the house in which she happened to be, but, on the other hand, the diocese of Amiens depended on her assistance for the support of the house in the Faubourg.

Among the counsellors of the Bishop there were some who deprecated the rigorous treatment which was being meted out to the Foundresses, but they were in the minority and their protests were unavailing.

With a tact, a prudence and a charity which seem almost incredible, the Foundresses had reserved to themselves the knowledge of the embarrassments of the situation. The Sisters, all of whom had received marks of Mère St. Joseph's kindness and owed much to her influence and example, welcomed her back wholeheartedly, and even Mère Victoire begged to be relieved of the embarrassment of acting as Superior in her presence. Consequently Mère St. Joseph, in the occasional absence of the Foundress, presided over the reunions of the Community; another fact which, while it was regarded as quite satisfactory by the Sisters, provoked criticism in higher quarters.

The projects of M. de Sambucy had at last been embodied in a rule drawn up in collaboration with the Vicar General, M. Cottu.

When the copy of this was remitted to the Superiors of the Faubourg for examination, the Bishop announced that the Sisters should make their vows in accordance with this rule on the Feast of the Annunciation, but made it a condition, *sine quâ non*, of his recognition of the Institute that Mère St. Joseph should make over her entire income to the house in the Faubourg.

The situation was crucial and the mental anguish of the Foundresses, faced with this momentous decision, may be imagined. To refuse was apparently to sign the death-warrant of the Congregation, to agree was to secure its continued corporate existence but to change its spirit completely.

On January 5, 1809, a Novena to the Infant Jesus was begun by the Sisters. The cry of their anguish and doubt brought the light they craved, and after serious reflection Mère Blin declined the proposals of the Bishop on the ground that she did not think it right to appropriate the whole of her income to the single house of Amiens.

In consequence of this step, the Foundresses received on January 12, 1809, a formal dismissal from the diocese. The decision was not, of course, unforeseen; it was accepted with calm, and even with a sense of relief by those who had been so long in suspense as to the Divine Will in the matter. Its victims thanked God who had made His purposes clear and set themselves forthwith to organise their exodus.

It was arranged that Mère Julie should be the first to leave, and that Mère Blin should remain at Amiens to the last to superintend the departure of the other

Sisters and to safeguard the material interests of the Institute.

On January 15 Mère Julie gave for the last time her blessing to her children on their native soil, and the Sisters of Notre Dame ceased to live and labour for France.

The task undertaken by Mère St. Joseph was neither easy nor pleasant. To the physical labours necessitated by a departure on so large a scale were added the more serious difficulties raised by interested persons. On the evening of Julie's departure M. de Sambucy, having secured the absence of Mère St. Joseph on one pretext or another, went to the convent and in a passionate speech tried to inspire terror into the hearts of the Sisters, who, nevertheless, remained firm in their determination to follow the Foundresses. Then a vicar-general of the diocese called to suggest that Mère St. Joseph should revise her decision. Meeting with no success he betook himself to his pen and wrote her a still more violent reprimand.

"I have received a long letter from M. F——," writes Mère St. Joseph, "in which he abuses you, according to the prevailing fashion. As for me, his letter undertakes to enlighten me in order that I may be able to choose between my Bishop and Sister Julie. But my Bishop is at Namur and my choice is made. I hope God will bless it, for my intention is right." The rectitude of her intention indeed was never questioned. "I like to believe that you are quite persuaded you are in the right," says M. F——, "because you are incapable of deceit."

Not even then was the matter closed. The next attack came from a zealous missionary named M. Dalainville. Hearing by chance of the departure of the Community, and being well aware that from

an apostolic point of view the Sisters were an important asset to the diocese, he hastened to the Faubourg, and apostrophising Mère St. Joseph in a loud voice, with vehement gestures poured out upon her the torrents of his eloquence in an attempt to shatter her determination. Her decision, however, had not been lightly taken, and against that rock the tide of his vehemence broke in vain.

More painful still than these encounters, because more intimate, was the temporary defection of Mme. de Franssu from the sympathetic support she had so long given to Frances. It was impossible also to explain the situation to the Blin de Bourdon family, who naturally regarded the closing of the Amiens house as a failure, if not indeed as a disgrace.

It was not easy for Mère St. Joseph to maintain the balance between charity towards her accusers and loyalty towards her leader. Mère Julie, in one of her almost daily letters, gaily reminded her that these difficulties would save her years of Purgatory. She retorted that she was afraid they might, on the contrary, lengthen her sojourn there, since they made it impossible for her to be completely detached, for she could not help rejoicing in the thought that Providence would not ordain that she should stay at Amiens.

Everything, indeed, even to the unpleasant necessity of discussing financial arrangements with the diocesan authorities, seemed to combine to make the situation disagreeable. It will be readily understood that to a nature so disinterested anything approaching to a contest over money was distasteful in the extreme. Frances had, as we have seen, sacrificed without a pang of regret her grandmother's rich inheritance, and of the portion which accrued to her on her father's death she had sacrificed the proprietorship and had become

merely its administrator. But as administrator she was no longer free; she was responsible to the Cause to which she had pledged herself and her worldly possessions; and she now had to reclaim for her Cause what she had previously sacrificed for herself. Mère Julie knew the royal open-handedness of her spiritual child, but she knew too her capacity for self-mastery, and she did not hesitate to remind her that it was her duty to act in this matter like a poor person, since she had made herself poor for the love of God. The incident throws light on the relations which existed between these two noble souls: a heroic submission on the part of the one and an unsparing exaction of the highest virtue on the part of the other.

The last days at Amiens indeed were extremely painful to Mère St. Joseph, and nothing but the conviction that her duty to God and to her Superior demanded that she should stay there and see the affair through would have given her the necessary strength to fight her repugnance.

"I have to hold myself in, not to run away from here," she writes. "How weary I am of it; it seems like a year since you left." And again, "God preserves me in health and in peace, but all the same I feel out of my element here; it is time this was finished."

And yet through all the distress of those weeks of agony Mère St. Joseph found time not only to show her appreciation of the smallest kindness and consideration offered to her, but to take a sympathetic interest in the minor troubles of those under her. This power of maintaining an unreproachful sympathy with others smarting under a small worry while she was crushed with great ones, must have been in Mère St. Joseph one of the most valuable qualities of the religious superior.

“When you write, send a little message for Sister Angélique; you know the human heart, it will give her pleasure.”

“Mère Victoire renders me many kind services and seems to be truly attached to us.” Such is her recognition of one who had not counted for nothing in the troubles they were undergoing.

“I have heard,” she writes again, “that the Sisters of Montdidier are in desolation. I have written them a long letter.”

Indeed the Sisters of Montdidier, ill-informed of what was going on at Amiens, were fluctuating between their Foundress in disgrace, and their ecclesiastical superior who could neither see nor represent the situation from any point of view but his own. The letter referred to here is even to-day one of the most important documents in the justification of Mère Julie, and its clear and simple exposition of the situation brought back the waverers to their allegiance.

Mère St. Joseph committed to writing an account of the difficulties at Amiens with a view to the justification of Mère Julie, and in order to remove the misunderstanding which in the eyes of those who were not informed of the facts laid her reputation under a temporary cloud. This document, which was addressed to the Vicar-General, for some unknown reason was not despatched to him, but was preserved in the archives of the Institute. It proved, moreover, to be unnecessary, for as soon as lapse of time permitted matters to be seen in due perspective it was acknowledged that, in safeguarding the spirit of her Institute, Julie had acted judiciously and wisely.

On March 1, 1809, Mère St. Joseph left Amiens for Namur without any mark of honour from those for whose interests she had loyally worked; at Amiens it seemed as though the Institute had perished.

When the spot on earth on which we happen to be turns from the sun, we are apt to say the sun has set. And Amiens deemed that the sun of the Institute had set because Amiens had turned from it ; later no doubt the city realised that its rejection was but the means of bringing Namur into the sunlight.

CHAPTER XII

THE MOTHER HOUSE AT NAMUR

ONCE more the patient, prayerful waiting on the manifestation of God's Will, which marks the whole history of Julie and her Institute, was justified by the event. Exiled from Amiens, Julie was invited by both the Archbishop of Bordeaux and the Bishop of Namur to establish her Mother house in their respective dioceses.

The first invitation would have kept the Institute in the land of its birth; but, on the other hand, Belgium was the home of the first branch foundation.

Mère Julie had on the occasion of her first visit to Namur felt strongly attracted to the city, which had always been dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, an attraction which a month's residence served to strengthen. She wrote with exultant gratitude to Mère St. Joseph of the cordial welcome given to the Sisters by the Bishop and the townsfolk.

Mère St. Joseph was no less enthusiastic. Indeed she had had, as it would seem, as early as 1807, a premonition that the foundation of Namur would eventually be the Mother house of the Institute, and had expressed the conviction in one of her letters to Mère Julie. Now, when the transition was accomplished and she was reunited with the Foundress, she remarks: "We are once more united, and united in Namur, whereas it seemed as if Namur were going to separate us for ever. Now I see plainly that it is

God who has brought this about. The contradictions of men have accomplished the designs of God, who no doubt willed this change of dwelling for hidden ends, which we do not know, but which we begin to discern, and which we may understand fully later on."

M. de Sambucy, realising from the departure of the first group of Sisters with Mère Julie that the breaking-up of the Amiens Community was decided upon, hastened to justify his own conduct. He wrote a long letter of explanation which he sent by express messengers to the Bishops of Ghent and Namur. So confident was he of making his views prevail, that he boasted openly, but, as events proved, prematurely, of his expected triumph, in the presence of the remnant of the Community at the Faubourg.

He told them that Sister Gertrude (Ciska Steenhaut), who had resolutely refused to be detached from Mère Julie, would be recalled to a sense of duty by the Bishop of Ghent, to whose diocese she belonged, that the Bishop of Namur had been warned and would not welcome Mère Julie, that she would come back with her daughters to ask for forgiveness at Amiens, that, besides, Mgr. Pisani was hard to satisfy, and that they would not find it all gain to be in his diocese.

Both these prudent prelates, however, made themselves acquainted with the facts of the situation, and M. de Sambucy's forecast was completely falsified. "Courage! Mère Julie," wrote Mgr. de Broglie, Bishop of Ghent, "do not abandon your primitive spirit, for it is good, do not be afraid; all this proves that your foundation comes from God." And on another occasion he added these words, which subsequent events proved to be prophetic: "Your vocation is to go all over the world, you are not intended to remain in one single diocese; your Sisters must not leave my diocese."

Mgr. Pisani was more explicit still. He wanted, he said, no Institute without a Superior General, and regarded it as indisputable that a Superior General was an absolute necessity, "not on account of Mère Julie, but because the good of the Institute requires it." He wished also that Namur should be chosen as the Mother house. "Yes, yes," he said in an interview with the Foundress, "it is God's Will that you should come to Namur; stay here, Sister, I am delighted to have you."

And so it was that with full diocesan approval, in 1809, the house of Namur received the title and the privileges of the Mother house of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

The fundamental points, for the maintenance of which the rupture with Amiens had not been too heavy a price to pay, were now solidly established, and the Foundresses wished to draw up a definite constitution which might receive formal episcopal approval, and later on the supreme sanction of the Pope.

Once more, however, they were obliged to postpone their project, this time on account of difficulties arising on the part of the civil government.

Napoleon was at this moment at the pinnacle of his glory. Like a second Augustus he had succeeded in uniting in his person the different branches of State Government: he aimed now at extending his power over the Church. According to his view the hierarchy was no more than one branch of the authority which was centred in his person. The religious communities of women, however, had so far flourished without his beneficent interest or interference; he proposed now to apply to them also his military system.

To this end he required that in 1807 the various institutes should furnish him with a copy of their

statutes, in order that these might receive imperial approbation.

The usefulness of the Congregations devoted to corporal works of mercy he did not question, but he refused to recognise the various contemplative Communities, a step which was tantamount to suppressing them.

He proceeded to create two regiments, as it were—one for nursing sisters and one for those engaged in teaching. In one or other of these two bodies he proposed to enrol all the members of the religious orders in the empire, with a lordly disregard for discrepancies of individual rules and differences of spirit.

God watched over His flock, however, and the projected reforms never passed into actual law. But until the day when the power which had conceived them was itself shattered, the nuns lived in a ceaseless alternation of hope and fear.

The correspondence of the two Foundresses contains frequent allusions to this grave anxiety. Sometimes the famous “*Affaires de Paris*” delay a foundation, sometimes prevent one, sometimes entail upon Mère Julie innumerable journeys and interviews to plead the cause of her houses.

Realising that it was unwise to draw up hard-and-fast regulations for the detailed life of the Congregation while its future was so uncertain, Mère Julie and Mère St. Joseph devoted themselves heart and soul to the religious formation of the Sisters at Namur, in order that when they left the Mother house they might carry its spirit into the secondary houses, maintaining its traditions through all diversities of time and place.

It will be interesting at this point to retrace our steps a little and to review briefly the history of the Namur

house from its foundation in 1807 up to the moment when, as described in the previous pages, it witnessed the reunion of the Foundresses and became the Mother house of the Institute. On every page of that history we trace the influence of Mère St. Joseph, its first Superior, whose plans were conceived and executed with a view to its future expansion, and growth in importance. Her experience in directing the affairs of Gézaincourt and of Bourdon had given her the breadth of outlook necessary to distinguish between religious poverty and a crippling insufficiency, and though the Community at times felt some inconvenience due to the modesty of their resources, their poverty was never sordid.

From the very beginning his Lordship Mgr. Pisani showed the greatest solicitude for the welfare of the Sisters. His episcopal palace was close by the convent, and he called frequently to see whether all was going well and whether they were in need of anything. On his part he was well pleased with the dignified reserve of manner which characterised the Sisters, and of which the bearing of the Superior offered so perfect an example. This dignity, so necessary in Community life, where constant association might engender a certain disregard of mutual deference, was a valuable asset to those who were engaged in education; it was reflected in the good manners of their pupils, and won an excellent reputation for the school, to which pupils flocked in large numbers.

Already, in October 1808, Sister Xavier had over eighty poor children in her classes; another sister was sent to help, and then the class accommodation was found insufficient.

Side by side with the flourishing free school the germ of a boarding school began to develop. Reference is made to the arrival of four boarders on the feast

of St. Teresa, of a fifth in November, and of four others before the close of 1808.

Sister Elizabeth Michel, known in religion as Sister Gonzague, was summoned from Amiens to take charge.

It was towards the end of April 1809 that, as we have seen, Mère Julie, having secured the permission of Mgr. Demandolx to visit the Belgian houses, arrived at Namur unannounced, and took Mère St. Joseph back with her to Amiens. The absence of the Superior, prolonged as it was beyond its expected limits, was a source of difficulties for the house at Namur. Sister Xavier, who was left in charge, succumbed through over-work. She was obliged to dismiss her class and take to her bed; moreover, through lack of Sisters, the general discipline of the school began to suffer.

M. Minsart, anxious at the prolonged absence of Mère St. Joseph, had written to her on July 20, 1808: "The closing words of your letter to the Bishop have given him a suspicion that you may abandon us and remain perhaps at the house in Amiens. For my part I cannot believe that you have such an idea, and that your Mother would keep you there considering the necessity of your person to carry out the work of God here, and He has chosen you for that purpose. All the same this news has made me a little uneasy, and soon, thinking over things before God, the certainty of your return based on the goodness of God, who will not allow you to abandon us, restored peace to my soul. We are awaiting you then as soon as the good of the Amiens house has been secured."

In a later letter M. Minsart insists still more strongly. "Remember," he writes, "that we shall not allow you to be separated from your Namur house, seeing that Sister Xavier is growing daily weaker. The sacrifice imposed on us by your absence would be

painful, if your presence at Amiens were not so necessary."

In reply, Mère St. Joseph protested her fidelity to Namur, and gave proof of it by referring again to the plan for enlarging the establishment which she had had in view before her departure. She even begged the holy priest to consider the question of ways and means.

M. Minsart was only waiting for the suggestion, and by the 14th of August he sent to Mère St. Joseph the account of what he had done: "We have in view three large houses with large gardens; they will soon be to let, and I hope then that Our Lord will send us troops of children. Already, after the holidays we shall find it impossible to house the boarders who are coming in."

At the last moment the plan nearly fell through owing to the opposition of Mgr. Pisani, who hesitated on account of the large expenditure involved. It was at this juncture, however, that Mère Julie was able to visit the Belgian foundations; she was at Namur at the critical moment, and the cause was gained. She wrote to Mère St. Joseph, who had remained at Amiens: "The house is all they described to us, and the garden larger than the Bishop's, as we were told. The house is old, but well built; it is not beautiful, but very much more suitable in size than the other for accommodating twenty-four or thirty boarders, according to the calculations of M. Minsart. The rent is 300 florins and we shall conclude the business to-morrow.

"There are nine very nice boarders; two more are expected on the first of the month, and we are told that as soon as we are in another house many will come."

M. Minsart was delighted with the success of his enterprise and wrote in his turn to Mère St. Joseph:

“Mère Julie will have told you what Satan did to prevent our getting the new house, but God graciously gave us the victory.” He went on in a tone of pleased congratulation to enumerate in detail the advantages of his conquest. “The beautiful garden you wanted so much for the Sisters and children is yours; you can come and enjoy it whenever you like. The consideration which persuaded me to take a house like this—only following in this matter your own intentions—is that we shall be able to receive at least 200 poor children. . . . Another reason, of which I may not tell all the circumstances is that I have great hopes of obtaining the adjoining house; if that were so, the two together would make the largest site in the town, the most useful and the best situated, seeing that it would be central. . . .”

The desires of his apostolic heart were necessarily restricted for the moment by the limits of his resources, but he had already conceived large hopes which the future was to realise. Meantime the benefactor made no allusion to the part played by his own generosity—it was thanks to him that the lease of the property was secured for two years.

The mansion of the Counts de Quarré, upon the tenancy of which the Sisters of Notre Dame entered on December 6, 1808, had a long and interesting history. The silence of the cloister and the turmoil of the camp had succeeded each other within its walls, and had yielded in their turn to the peace and serenity of family life, before it again fell into the hands of religious.

In 1398 a wealthy couple, Collin and Gertrude Dupont, resolved to devote their money to religious purposes. They possessed a spacious house in the rue des Fossés, with many dependencies and a large garden. This extensive property they turned into a



Entrance to the Mother House, Namur
(Mansion of the Counts de Quarre).

Béguinage for seven tertiaries of St. Francis. Gertrude Dupont, on the death of her husband, entered this Béguinage and spent the years of her widowhood in edifying seclusion. After her death the fervour of the Béguines relaxed, and according to the express provision of the founders for such a case, the property was taken from them by the heirs of Gertrude Dupont and made over in 1463 to the Cistercian monks of Boneffe.

During these troublous times it was customary for every abbey to provide for its monks a refuge in the nearest fortified town, in which they might seek shelter from the horrors of war. The house on the rue des Fossés served this purpose for the Cistercians, who made use of it in time of peace as a store-house and often let part of it out to tenants.

The sons of St. Bernard when they entered into possession of the Béguinage carved over the doorway an image of their spiritual father, which is still to be seen there.

For some three centuries the Cistercians retained possession of the "refuge," in the shelter of which some of their abbots ended their troubled careers, while others were invested with their abbatial dignity within its walls.

Dom Gérard Ubrici, who was Abbot during the Dutch wars, left traces of his sojourn there, for he rebuilt in brick the wooden construction known as the *grand quartier*, which became the actual convent, while one of his successors renovated the *petit quartier* by decoration in the style of Louis XV.

However, hard times fell upon the monks, and in 1710 the *grand quartier* was sold to a certain Gérard Raymond, the *petit quartier* passing also out of the hands of the monks in 1794.

In 1759 the *grand quartier* became the property of

the Counts de Quarré, from whom it was rented, as we have seen, in 1808 by the Sisters of Notre Dame.

As the house had been untenanted for fourteen years, it may be readily understood that enormous labour was necessary to make it thoroughly habitable. The Sisters were occupied all day in teaching, and Sister Xavier, who was growing daily weaker, was physically incapable of coping with the herculean task which faced her and the Community.

M. Minsart had recently been promoted to the charge of the parish of St. John the Evangelist. Though his new position overwhelmed him with work, his interest in the Sisters was as keen as ever. He recognised the difficulty of the situation, and fearing that if help were not soon available the undertaking in the rue des Fossés might fail altogether, he wrote an urgent letter to Mère St. Joseph, representing the critical nature of the situation and begging her to hasten her return.

Providentially, at this moment, the fateful decision was taken to leave Amiens and transfer the Mother house to Namur.

The first detachment of Sisters from Amiens, led by Mère Julie, arrived at Namur on January 21, 1809, and the support of her presence and her marvellous energy soon changed the face of things.

Her letters to Mère St. Joseph are enthusiastic in the satisfaction they express with the new house, in which, she tells her, it is possible to taste the happiness of solitude, though it is in the heart of the town, and which is so commodious that every day they discover new rooms in it. "The house lends itself to good arrangement," she writes. "Come, you will find our little household already in swing, and a chapel which I hope will be to your taste; it is very solitary and quite close to your room."

Mère Julie found the house in an extraordinarily neglected condition, and the cellars, the garden, the courtyards, the innumerable attics, all in a state of unparalleled disorder. By the assiduous labours of its new occupants, however, the whole place soon began to take on a different aspect, and though regiments of workmen were still employed, the most necessary alterations were rapidly completed. One of the greatest joys to Mère Julie and her community at Namur was that there they were able to wear their religious habit, a thing which had not been possible in France. "My dear friend," she writes to Mère St. Joseph in February 1809, "I cannot tell you how pleased our Sisters are with our habit, when we are all together in the refectory and in our future chapel, which is waiting for you."

The weary time of separation was drawing to its close, however; the happy news of Mère St. Joseph's arrival is chronicled in the annals of the Namur convent under the date of March 5, 1809, and shortly afterwards permission was given by Mgr. Pisani for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament and the celebration of daily Mass. The date of the first Mass is not known with exactitude.

Just at this time the house passed by a division of the property of the Counts de Quararé into the hands of the Countess of Ribeaucourt. As she did not propose to retain it, she gave to the Sisters the first option of its purchase. The transaction was concluded and the money paid on December 13. Thus the first house which the Sisters actually bought was the Mother house at Namur. The money with which it was purchased was that part of Mère St. Joseph's fortune which had been left under the administration of M. de Sambucy, and which had been handed over by him to Mère Julie in the previous September.

After the arrival of Mère St. Joseph at Namur she took up again the reins of government as Superior of that house, while Mère Julie in her capacity as Mother General was able to devote her energies to the secondary foundations. Both hearts were filled with consolation, and Mère Julie had reason to bless God for the excellence of her companion's administration and for her gifts of government. She was herself obliged to make frequent journeys either to visit the convents already in existence or to make arrangements regarding projected foundations. During her absence all the weight of authority fell on the shoulders of Mère St. Joseph, who exercised it with the ease born of long custom ; no sooner, however, did the Superior General return than the self-effacement of the Co-foundress became even more remarkable than the dignity with which she had maintained her position as Superioress.

Every morning, after spending some time in conference with Mère Julie over the affairs of the Institute, she betook herself to the kitchen, not to direct, not to superintend, but to lend a willing hand in the cooking. The Sisters were accustomed to see her spend hours on her knees weeding the garden, or making the beds in the dormitories of the boarders. No occupation was regarded as beneath her dignity, always her one desire was to help the Sisters, and to render assistance wherever it was needed.

As for her social rank, no reference was ever made to it, and many a Sister who had entered the Institute after its transference from Amiens to Namur lived in the Community for long months without knowing anything of the position the Superior had held in the world.

M. Minsart, who was a competent judge, used to say that the most manifest and incontestable proof of the humility of the two Foundresses was the fact

that, with such widely different types of character, there should never have been a shadow of disagreement between them.

From the moment when Namur became the centre of the Institute, the work of expansion which had been jeopardised at Amiens began.

The Community of St. Nicolas was transferred to Ghent, in which town two houses were founded, one in the parish of St. Pierre, and the other in the ancient Abbey of Nouveau Bois ; at the same time the establishment of St. Hubert formed the first foundation of Notre Dame in the picturesque district of the Ardennes.

A new link between the Sisters and the Bishop of Ghent was forged by the opening of the house at Zèle, and this was followed two years later by foundations at Gembloux and Andenne.

Finally, when the diocese of Tournai was restored to its legitimate Bishop, Mgr. Hirn, a convent was founded at Fleurus. This house was opened in 1814, just after the Treaty of Paris was concluded, separating Belgium from France.

It was the ninth of the Belgian foundations and was the last made by the Foundress herself.

The religious formation of the subjects for all these secondary foundations had been in the hands of Mère St. Joseph ; to her likewise they owed the sum total of their accomplishments as teachers. Their gratitude and devotion to her were boundless, and on her part she followed them by her interest in their work and by her prayers when they left Namur, and received them with the tenderest of welcomes when they returned there in the holidays.

While her moral and mental strength contributed in this way to the spiritual progress of the Institute, her fortune was devoted to its material needs. The

early secondary foundations were usually made in response, sometimes to the generosity of a benefactor, sometimes to the request of a municipality, but in every case the support furnished fell far short of the actual requirements, and it was the purse of Mère St. Joseph which supplied the deficit.

In cases where her income did not suffice, the capital itself was drawn upon and saved the existence of more houses than one. Thus it is recorded that in 1816 Mlle. Blin de Bourdon sold the last portions of her patrimony, but each estate sacrificed in France secured another foundation for the Institute in Belgium. A transaction of this kind procured for the Sisters of Notre Dame the Abbey of Nonnenbosch, Ghent.

It was at that critical moment when Mère Julie had decided that the house at St. Nicolas, which was unhealthy and in bad condition, must be closed. She had gone there in person, and was arranging to disperse the Community among the other foundations, when a sudden change of plan made her write to Mère St. Joseph as follows: " Monseigneur of Ghent, who was very anxious to make us stay in his diocese, was hampered by lack of means; I, who realised all his goodness to us, taking your heart in mine in Our Lord, said to him: ' Well, Monseigneur, since you are so good to us we will do all that depends on us to help to make a foundation. I am persuaded of the goodwill of Sister St. Joseph.' Monseigneur was overjoyed. There, my dear friend, that was how I thought the matter over in God's presence. I believed that in accordance with His holy Will we ought not to abandon a house in so good a diocese and one so close to our own. I seemed to talk it over with you and that you also saw in it the holy Will of God. I trust, my dear friend, that I have judged rightly, for I would not like to do anything without your advice. But I know

your dispositions and that they are all for the greater glory of God. No! no one in the world will be able to separate us from one another, because our bond of union is God alone."

The close union between the two Foundresses was the greatest strength of their joint apostolate. Mère St. Joseph was absolutely loyal to her spiritual Mother, and her devotedness always showed itself stronger in time of trial. The difficult days of Amiens had been one proof of this, but the trial which lay ahead and which cast its shadow over the last days of Mère Julie was to witness to it more strongly still.

The origin of this misunderstanding was connected with the religious persecution under Napoleon. Unable to control his exasperation at the resistance of Pope Pius VII, the Emperor had resolved to sever all connection with the Papacy. In defiance of all Canon law, therefore, he called together the National Council of 1811, and demanded from the assembled Bishops that they should confer upon him the right of appointment and dismissal of bishops. It was wittily remarked that no doubt the Holy Ghost would exercise much influence over the Council under the form of an eagle, but little or none under the form of a dove. The result was as might have been foreseen; the Bishops uttered a firm and courageous refusal; the Council was dissolved, the Bishops of Ghent, Tournai and Troyes were arrested during the night with their theologians and chaplains and imprisoned at Vincennes. To the universal grief of the Belgians, they were subsequently exiled and their dioceses fell into the hands of creatures of Napoleon.

Mgr. Pisani, Bishop of Namur, had more than once defended the rights of the Church and the Pope before the Council, but strangely enough he escaped from the persecution which fell on his colleagues and returned

quietly to Namur. Though he escaped the enemy without, he fell into the hands of the enemy within, and at the instigation of a small section of disaffected persons in Ghent was charged with having introduced into his diocese the unorthodox "Universal Catechism of the Empire."

To anyone who knew the Bishop and the circumstances the calumnious nature of the charge was evident, but it did not fail to prejudice him in the eyes of those at a distance.

The cloud of suspicion fell over Julie also, and a proposal was made by some of the clergy of Ghent to divide the Institute according to dioceses, alleging that Julie was not competent to retain the post of Superior General.

It was the supreme trial, and Julie recognised in it a sign that the end was approaching. She had been forewarned indeed that persecution on the part of her own religious children would follow persecution on the part of her Bishop. The latter trial had ended in her complete rehabilitation; the exquisite suffering caused by this new and final purification was due to the defection and distrust of some of the most beloved of her spiritual daughters, who entered into a conspiracy against her person and her authority.

And what rôle was Mère St. Joseph to play during this period? She, who knew as none other did the soul of Julie, stood steadfastly by her side through the raging storm. She defended her on grounds of principle, knowing her to be in the right, she consoled her out of the love she bore her, and in virtue of her office she became the advocate of her cause for the present and for the future.

At the darkest moment of those dark days she wrote to Sister Anastasie Leleu, the Superior of Jumet:

"We are the two eldest daughters, who have seen

and known the beginnings. It is not easy for the others to appreciate our Mother as we do, but you know as well as I that she has been formed and prepared by long training for the work she is doing, and that in a wonderful way. And if one takes a wide view of the matter, one can see that there is an abundant blessing on it in spite of all the vexations which human ignorance and weakness, to say nothing of the malice of the devil, do not cease to excite. I wish that we had the energy, the zeal, the self-forgetfulness of our good Mother; people would not make so much fuss about the trifles they allege against her if they realised better the excellence of the qualities with which God has endowed her."

In the last chapters of her *Memoirs* Mère St. Joseph, referring to the matter, expresses her own views regarding the greatness of character to which eyes less discerning than hers were blinded by their own trivial preoccupations. It was clear, she wrote, that these misunderstandings were allowed by a special design of God, in order that the soul He was about to call to Himself might be tried by enduring the keenest of all sufferings, and might give proof of its perfect meekness. It was the final touch of the sculptor's chisel upon His work.

In January 1816 Mère Julie's health began to give cause for serious anxiety: it was the beginning of the illness which after three months of alternating hopes and fears was to set her spirit free. From the first moment Mère St. Joseph took her place by Julie's sick-bed, from that post of filial devotion she directed the Community of Namur and the whole Institute; in the school of those painful weeks she assimilated the last lessons of the spirit of the Foundress, which she was to pass on to the generations of her spiritual children.

On March 12 she writes hopefully to Sister Anastasie. She tells her that Sisters and pupils are making a Novena to St. Joseph, to obtain from the Heart of Jesus, through the Saint's intercession, the cure of their Mother. She recalls her former cure. Cannot the same Jesus who restored her to them for the establishment of the Institute preserve her by a second intervention for its consolidation?

A little later she writes again still hopefully, and even discusses the possibility of a projected establishment at Dinant. She has written to the sub-prefect to say that Mère Julie will go there as soon as she is better.

The strain of these varying emotions, however, proved too much for the health of Mère St. Joseph, and at the end of March she herself was obliged to take to her bed with so severe an attack of pleurisy that it was thought prudent to administer the last Sacraments.

So for some days the scythe of death hung over two beds of suffering in the stricken house of Namur, and the Sisters wondered in anguish whether they were destined to lose both their mothers at once.

On the 7th of April Mère St. Joseph dragged herself with difficulty to the bedside of the Mother she loved. The effort resulted in a relapse. Her fever increased, and so it happened that on the next day when God called Mère Julie to Himself, this loving and faithful heart was denied even the sad consolation of closing her eyes.

"God preserve Mère St. Joseph to us!" exclaimed Mgr. Pisani when he heard of Julie's death; "I am afraid she will succumb under this terrible blow."

God did preserve her, but it almost seemed as though the Institute was destined even then to perish. No less than eight of the Namur Community, teaching



Convent of Sisters of Notre Dame, Dinant (before 1914).



Boarding School of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Liège

Sisters for the most part, were dangerously ill, and the rest were overcome by the combined labours of nursing and teaching, and broken by their grief. But the children of Julie had caught something of their Mother's intrepid spirit. They redoubled their prayers, their penances and their labours for the preservation of the work which had cost so many sacrifices. And God heard them.

The instant the news of the death of Mère Julie reached Jumet, Sister Anastasie hastened to Namur. The Sisters welcomed her like an angel of consolation, and Mère St. Joseph was deeply touched. "My dear, dear child," she said in a voice broken by emotion, "this is just like you; take care of your Sisters."

And by these informal words, Sister Anastasie, the first companion of the Foundresses, whom Mère Julie used to call playfully her "little counsellor," as Mère St. Joseph was her "big counsellor," was appointed Superior of Namur and first assistant of the future Mother General.

CHAPTER XIII

GENERALATE OF MÈRE ST. JOSEPH

THE blow had fallen, and for a moment the heart of the Institute seemed to cease to beat. So it must ever seem to those who have been associated in the initiation of some great undertaking with a companion of forceful personality of whom they are suddenly deprived.

But Julie was not after all the source of the work, she was but the instrument of its inception. The same forces which had laid the foundation of the Institute were at hand to ensure its preservation and growth. So long as God has need of any organisation, and so long as His chosen human instruments prove docile to His Will, and zealous for His glory, its permanence is independent of the individual agents whose personal presence seems to a merely human view so necessary.

At the time of her death Julie left eight flourishing houses in Belgium, and the number of subjects was fifty-eight professed Sisters and twenty-five novices. One after another the houses which had been founded in France had been closed, with the single exception of that at Montdidier, from which also, however, the Sisters were removed within a year from her death, completing the transplantation of the Institute from the land of its birth to the land of its adoption.

When the news of her death was spread abroad, innumerable messages of condolence and testimonies of esteem poured in upon the Mother house. One

of these emanated from the episcopal palace of Amiens, and is interesting as showing that the Bishop, who had treated her and her infant Institute with such scant consideration, was nevertheless not blind to her merits.

“ I cannot express to you, Reverend Mother,” he writes, “ how deeply I feel the grievous loss you have experienced in the death of your good Mère Julie. You know the very tender attachment I bore her and the high regard in which I held her virtues. It is the Will of God to reward her fidelity, and I should be loth to regret for an instant the happiness she enjoys in heaven. The patience, the resignation she exhibited in her last illness were the final act of her sacrifice. Let us keep her example ever before our eyes ; may it serve to encourage us in the trials which we are called upon to suffer. I know that I am speaking to Sister Blin, to Sister St. Joseph, to the true friend of Sister Julie. Believe me that you inherit my regard for her, and that I maintain toward your congregation the same attachment which I showed her. . . .”

The archives of the Institute preserve also two other letters addressed to Mère St. Joseph at this time. The first of these is from the reverend Father Thomas, the first spiritual director of the Foundresses :

“ I heard at the same time of the death of our good Mère Julie and of your illness. I can quite believe that the loss you have sustained affects you more deeply than the danger which has threatened your own life. Even when one has excellent subjects in a house, it is difficult to fill the void left by so competent a Superior, when God takes her to Himself. I willingly unite my prayers with yours for the repose of the soul of our good Mother, although her rare qualities give us room to hope that she is with God. I should blame myself if I were to forget the important services she rendered

to me during the stormy years through which we passed together. I always considered her as a person of wise counsel and have never regretted following her advice. I do not know of anyone to whom I am under greater obligations, and I earnestly beg of God to reward her for me and for so many others who received salutary advice from her. . . .”

Father Varin, too, that true friend of the Institute, wrote in his turn from Paris :

“What a blow, my dear Mother, the Lord has dealt us in taking from us our good Mère Julie! But how adorable are His plans! He gave her to your little society in a way which glorified equally His power and His goodness. He has only recalled her to Himself now that she has fulfilled the designs He had in view. I am sure that the work of which she has been the instrument in the hands of God, far from suffering from her loss, will receive fresh prosperity through her intercession, for who could help having recourse now to her prayers? If they were so powerful over the Heart of God when she was in this place of exile, surely they will be more powerful still now that she is in her heavenly home, in the bosom of God. As a matter of fact, could we have any other view about our good Mother? and is not she, who when on earth lived only for love, destined to love for all eternity? This is a great subject of consolation and confidence for you, my dear Mother, who take her place. Yes, she will be more useful to you in heaven than on earth; she will make you feel intimately the effects of her power with God: she will draw down upon you the light and the graces you need to strengthen and extend the work of Our Lord, and all your daughters will recognise with you that they have in their good Mother a powerful protectress.”

After the death of Mère Julie, all the Sisters of

Notre Dame turned instinctively to Mère St. Joseph; they felt that the future of the Institute depended upon her, who had been from the beginning the valiant helper of the Foundress. And yet for some weeks her condition was so critical that it almost seemed as if Heaven was about to claim her too.

One evening, when the danger seemed imminent, Sister Eulalie assembled the boarders and took them to the chapel to make the Way of the Cross. Such was the fervour with which the exercise was made that none of those who assisted at it ever forgot the impression it made on them. Their prayers were heard, from that moment the danger was over, and little by little the patient began to gain ground. Early in May she was strong enough to receive the Sisters in little groups, and on the 21st of the same month she was sufficiently recovered to meet the Community.

On May 29, 1816, the first general chapter, consisting of all the Superiors and their assistants, met at Namur and entered into retreat for the election of a successor to the Superior General. The election took place on June 2nd, under the presidency of the ecclesiastical Superior, M. Médard, the Vicar General, and two of the clergy of Namur.

As was to be expected, the votes were unanimous in favour of Mère St. Joseph, a result at which everyone rejoiced exceedingly except the person most concerned.

Mère St. Joseph herself shrank from the responsibility, of which she alone realised the weight. She had hitherto had the support of Mère Julie, whose strong grasp of the supernatural had made the crosses easier to bear; now she would have to shoulder the burden alone, without even the human companionship which cutteth griefs in twain.

To M. Médard she confided the dread with which

her humility inspired her, avowing that her one consolation was that her incompetence would before long lead to her deposition from the post. M. Médard, however, who appreciated her capacity, encouraged and congratulated the Sisters on their choice. He felt that the Foundress must have blessed their votes, and that she herself offered to her daughters a successor after her own heart.

Mère St. Joseph was over sixty when the reins were placed in her hands, though her erect and dignified bearing belied her age. While not physically robust she possessed a fund of courage and spiritual energy which multiplied her powers of resistance tenfold. Her long and intimate association with Julie had deepened her knowledge of the ways of God ; for her, as for Julie herself, the one consuming passion was the love of God and of souls.

We have seen, too, that Mère Julie's direction of this gifted soul was not impaired by any weakness. The social superiority of her companion had never led Julie to abdicate the position of authority which was hers. With the singleness of purpose born of her absolute sincerity and simplicity, she had recognised their relative positions and had trained her companion to practise a high degree of obedience and humility. Consequently the government of the new Mother General was based on the sound principle of her own practice ; she could exact without hesitation a respect for constituted authority which she had been the first to show.

She had gained also by experience a rare knowledge of the weakness of human nature, which enabled her to judge with compassion and to save by her forbearance those erring souls who would have wandered still further from the right path under harsher treatment. So great a gift of understanding is only to be bought

at the cost of much suffering, but that cost Mère St. Joseph had paid.

The first act of her Generalate was to erect over the grave of Mère Julie in the public cemetery a simple stone, on which was cut her epitaph and a brief account of her life work. But, not content with this, she conceived another plan, the carrying out of which was not without its difficulties ; it was that of bringing back the body of the Foundress to a resting-place among her spiritual children. With this view a small oratory was built during the summer of 1817 in the garden of the Mother house, and to this, with the due ecclesiastical authorisation, the remains of Julie were secretly transferred fifteen and a half months after her death. On the occasion of this transference to the vault in the garden, the body was found incorrupt, as was testified by the Bishop of Namur.

None save those immediately concerned were made aware of the treasure thus housed in the little oratory of Our Lady, even the novices were not admitted to the knowledge of the secret until the eve of their profession.

While thus doing all that was in her power to secure the personal honour of Julie, and to maintain strong and ardent in her children the filial love of their mother, Mère St. Joseph set herself to carry out and develop her work.

Having confirmed Sister Anastasie in the superiority of the Mother house, she began the visitation of the secondary houses, after the manner established by the Foundress. Nothing escaped her penetrating eye ; the chapel, the domestic arrangements, the classes were all carefully examined, and she received each Sister individually. The responsibilities of her new office were not light. The Institute was still in its infancy and dependent for uniformity of practice on

the personal guidance of Mère St. Joseph and the older Sisters, and the living tradition of loyalty to Namur. No written document had so far regulated the practices established by the Foundress, and the very spirit of fervour which reigned in the various houses had its dangers; for the more ardent souls might, in their zeal, lay upon the weaker a multitude of observances which, while admirable as expressions of personal taste in spirituality, were inadvisable as the yoke of general observance. Some would extend the spiritual exercises to the detriment of other duties; others, in quest of poverty, would disregard a due sense of proportion; others again, whose personal attraction led them to austerity and to penance, would imperil the health of those who indiscreetly followed their example.

In her position as General, Mère St. Joseph had to cope with the too fervent and too critical, as well as with the too easy-going. Her preparation for the post had been long and thorough: her tact, culture and experience were all called into play.

The loss of Mère Julie's personal influence was deeply felt everywhere, by no one more deeply than by Mère St. Joseph herself. Loyal in every respect to her memory as she had been to her person, Mère St. Joseph kept the force of her personality alive in the Institute. She associated with her name every plan, every request. If it was necessary to give an order, or to point out a growing abuse, she would say, "My dear Sisters, *ma Mère Julie* wished us to do such a thing," or "recommended such a thing. We will do it in that way."

At every Community gathering the presence of Mère Julie was almost tangibly felt, her conferences were read aloud, her portrait, painted during her lifetime at the earnest request of the Co-foundress, was

hung in the Community room and smiled on them from its walls.

With such zeal did Mère St. Joseph keep in prominence the memory of Julie that it seemed as though her own personality would be completely effaced. The universal expectation was that the exercise of authority under her Generalate would be tempered with a large measure of gentleness and sweetness. But though this expectation was not falsified, it soon became evident that Mère St. Joseph's graciousness was not weakness, and that her rule would be as firm and strong as it was wise and gentle.

Certain restless spirits, whose respect for the Foundress had hitherto kept them in restraint, imagined that the same degree of deference would be unnecessary under the rule of her successor, and began to show an independence incompatible with religious discipline. Mère St. Joseph treated them as degenerate children of the Institute, and expelled them from it lest their pernicious example should corrupt others.

On one occasion a young Superior received from a family as a token of gratitude a dinner service of fine porcelain. The gift was an embarrassing one for a household whose inmates made profession of poverty. The Superior, realising this, of course, sent the service to adorn the boarders' refectory.

Shortly afterwards Mère St. Joseph made her visitation at the house in question, after which the china disappeared and the poor became the beneficiaries of its sale.

In another house lack of money had induced the Superior to endeavour to effect an economy by substituting a cotton material for the linen which had hitherto been used in the Institute. It was a departure from uniformity and a derogation from established

custom which Mère St. Joseph disapproved. She condemned the offending articles, but at the same time came to the help of the Superior by sending her a quantity of linen which had formed part of her own trousseau.

But if Mère St. Joseph recognised that obedience and religious uniformity were more important than self-imposed sacrifice, it was not that she deprecated the need for mortification.

The annals of the Institute bear witness that she was extremely watchful over the spirit of poverty and simplicity, and that she established a practical code of observance in regard to these virtues, so that there should be a fixed custom by which her successors might preserve the primitive tradition.

Her decisions were never dictated by simple expediency, but in all important questions she regarded the individual case as setting a precedent for the future. Thus if a Superior proposed a change, which at first sight presented certain advantages, she would never decide the point at once; she would answer, "I will consider the matter." And she would only give her decision after much prayer and mature consideration.

Her solicitude was always on guard against any contravention of the spirit of the Foundress.

Before the Manual of Prayers used by the Sisters of Notre Dame was compiled, she sent to the Superior of Ghent a notebook containing the text of all the prayers in use at Namur. "It may be," she wrote, "that in your house there are some words which are a little different in the morning and night prayers. Do me the favour of making everything alike in this matter."

She wrote on the same subject to the Superior of St. Hubert. "In regard to adding prayers to the morning and night prayers already in use among us,

I cannot allow this. If your needs are great, each Sister can say such prayers privately."

Mère St. Joseph urged the Superiors to inspire their Sisters with a salutary fear of innovations, and recommended them to show the example themselves by their own submission and deference.

The Superior of Dinant having, in virtue of her personal authority, laid upon her subjects certain practices which were not universal, Mère St. Joseph corrected the error of judgment by the following salutary counsel. "I should like you not only to be satisfied with knowing that you may do a certain thing, but when there are some circumstances which may seem novel, or may seem to emanate from you, I should like you to make known your motives, as it were casually. 'Ma Mère advised me to do so and so;' or 'Ma Mère does such and such a thing under such circumstances; we shall do the same.' Our dear Mère Julie recommended earnestly all these precautions to the Superiors; they must not rely on their personal authority.

"The age of the saints, who never gave any account of their conduct, in order to procure greater merit to their disciples, is past; nowadays that would produce a different effect. You cannot believe, my dear Sister, how one forestalls criticism and discussion by using the method I am pointing out to you. Subjects find the yoke easier to bear when they are treated with confidence and openness."

Placed as she was at the head of a teaching body, Mère St. Joseph put before herself from the very first the aim to be attained, she never lost sight of it and was never weary of reminding the Sisters of it. "Consider," she writes to the former Superior of Ghent, "whether you excite the emulation of your teaching Sisters for study. It is a duty for us, and I fear that

we shall have a serious account to render to God on this point."

In her desire to maintain in the Congregation the apostolic spirit of its early days, she exacted at least exterior indifference for places and employments.

"You know," she writes to a certain Sister Delphine, who showed too strong a natural attachment to her house and her occupation, "that we ought, like good soldiers, to be ready to march and to change our residence at a moment's notice."

Mère St. Joseph had, moreover, a very high degree of discernment of character and of talents, and we are told that in choosing Sisters for the various functions of the Institute she took carefully into consideration the natural inclinations of each, knowing that work which involves too much strain cannot be well done. Nevertheless, she never tolerated a relaxation or weakening of religious discipline and, like Mère Julie herself, she exacted from the Sisters a constant readiness to obey. It has been justly said that a command given in a tone of confidence is already half executed, and all the Sisters who lived under her Generalate owed most of their achievements to reliance on her sound judgment and tact. The magic recipe for success which she was ready to give to all is expressed in a letter she wrote to the Superior of Andenne: "With great confidence in God and humility no charge is heavy. God supports us when we abandon ourselves to Him and are not afraid of the judgments of men."

Dependence on God and independence of creatures; such was the double spring of her activity and the secret of her irresistible influence; even her accession to the Generalate was regarded simply as an opportunity for doing good in a wider sphere and a greater diversity of ways.

Her relations with her subjects were based on a

personal consideration and a mutual understanding which left no room for either harshness or servile fear, while at the same time she secured respect for the principle of authority which she represented with befitting dignity.

Before the death of Mère Julie foundations had been promised at Dinant and at Liège, and her successor hastened to carry out these promises, which she regarded as the last wishes of a mother.

Steps were first taken in favour of Dinant. Like most other towns of Belgium, this quaint little city on the Meuse had lain long in the state of torpor induced by the Revolution. When it began to recover, the first interest of its citizens was the re-establishment of its former material prosperity, in happy unconsciousness that the fruit of their efforts would be destroyed by the events of 1914.

The inhabitants of the Dinant of 1800, however, were not long-sighted, and they neglected the educational heritage of their ancestors. The flourishing college which had been established by the Jesuits was no more than a memory and, to quote a contemporary document, "the education of the children is shared between various individual teachers, whose talents and method are crowned only by a very mediocre success. Education is not free, and the poorer children, to a large extent, are unable to profit by it."

In 1812 the state of things was brought before the municipal authorities, but the decision then taken to establish schools was rendered ineffective by the Napoleonic wars.

After the Battle of Waterloo, when the reconstitution of the Low Countries had been confirmed by the plenipotentiaries of Vienna, Belgium, without any option, was placed under the sceptre of William of Orange. The new King, however, succeeded in

making himself popular with the townsfolk of Dinant, a success which was almost solitary, and which was later counterbalanced by a series of colossal blunders. The measures which had been projected by the municipality received his approval, and subsidies were granted for the organisation of public instruction.

A note in Mère St. Joseph's handwriting assigns November 14, 1815, as the date of the first overtures for a foundation of the Sisters of Notre Dame. On the invitation of the Burgomaster, Mère Julie had visited Dinant and had found in the suburb of St. Nicolas a spacious building, formerly a convent, which seemed suitable as to size, but was at some distance from the poorer quarters of the town.

In January 1816 the Burgomaster was authorised by his Council to conclude arrangements for receiving Sisters of Notre Dame, and for making them an allowance of a thousand francs towards the establishment of the house, and a further thousand francs annually until the house became self-supporting.

The matter was at this stage when Julie was stricken by her fatal illness. Nevertheless, with as brief delay as possible, the Sisters were sent to Dinant. On June 15, 1816, the Superior of Andenne received a letter from Mère St. Joseph in these terms: "My dear Sister Angèle, the moment has come at last to set out for Dinant. It will be next Wednesday, the 19th. I should like you to come to Namur on Monday 17th, so that I may see you and have a long talk with you."

On July 1 the Sisters were installed and the school opened. Mère St. Joseph writes to the Superior a word of congratulation on the kind welcome the Sisters had received from the townspeople, and reminds them that it is their duty to show themselves worthy of it. That the school should grow too rapidly is not desirable, she thinks, for if they need an extra mistress she does

not see any possibility of sending one at that time of year. God, however, will provide for it, if it is His Will that the necessity should arise.

The school did grow, however, and so rapidly that soon the house was too small to accommodate the pupils. In 1817 the Community secured a wing of the former Ursuline convent, the other wing being in possession of the Law Courts and police. Here they lived and prospered for nearly half a century. But when political passion began to run high, the Sisters were obliged to leave. Tossed about from place to place, they found at last a permanent establishment in the spacious "Hotel of the Golden Head." There they were still installed when the catastrophe of 1914 struck such a momentous blow to the work of nearly a century. Neither fire nor destruction, however, extinguished their zeal, and they have reopened their schools in the midst of the ruined city.

Such was the history of the Dinant foundation. In the same year, 1816, steps were taken to open the long-desired house at Liège.

As early as 1810 the parish priest of St. Nicolas had begged Mère Julie to found a convent there. "M. le Curé," replied Julie, "make the Sacred Heart loved in your parish and you shall have Sisters."

The devotion to the Sacred Heart was not as universal in Belgium then as happily it is to-day, and to give public expression to one's private devotions called for a certain degree of courage.

The zealous priest of St. Nicolas, however, set himself to fulfil his part of the contract and established a flourishing Confraternity of the Sacred Heart. The foundation would have been made some years before the death of Mère Julie, as early as 1813, had not Belgium once more been turned into a battlefield. As soon as peace was restored, negotiations were resumed

with Mère St. Joseph, who agreed to make the foundation in October 1816. On the 14th of that month, accordingly, Sister Anastasie set out for Liège to establish the new Community there in the name of the Mother General. In spite of the solicitude of the priests of St. Nicolas, the new house was founded in poverty and humiliation. The day after the arrival of the Sisters, all the children of the neighbourhood poured in. A poor school was organised on the ground floor, while on the first floor were the classes of those pupils who were in a position to offer some slight remuneration. Accommodation soon became cramped, and trusting to the charity of the parishioners, who offered them some rooms, the Sisters gave up to the children the quarters reserved for themselves.

After five or six days Sister Anastasie returned to Namur full of consolation and of hope for the new enterprise, which seemed destined to great success, thanks to the zeal of the parish priest for a work undertaken in the name of the Sacred Heart.

All went well for a few months, and then it seemed as though Satan was furious at seeing the children snatched from him. He made use of the proprietor of the rooms to which the Sisters had retired before the advancing tide of scholars.

One morning this man arrived and notified the Sisters that they must leave his house that very evening. The cause of this sudden and violent measure was never known; the Sisters tried, but in vain, to come to terms—they had no contract to protect their rights, and were obliged to leave.

A temporary refuge was found for the expelled Community, and the school-children were sheltered in the cloisters of the disused church of St. Nicolas. Shortly afterwards the Sisters acquired two small houses, which became the nucleus of the vast

establishment which has since grown up on the same spot.

Thus already in the first four months of her Generalate Mère St. Joseph had the happiness of witnessing the extension of the work of Julie by two new foundations.

Throughout the Institute also the impression began to gain ground that the universal esteem in which the memory of the Foundress was held would culminate sooner or later in the glory of her Beatification.

CHAPTER XIV

ORGANISATION

It will be well, before beginning to tell the story of the Generalate of Mère St. Joseph, crowded as it is with incident, to study for a few moments the nature of her contribution to the structure of the Institute of Notre Dame.

It has been said that Mère Julie dug the ground and laid the foundations of the edifice strong and solidly established. The erection of the building and the finishing touches were the task of Mère St. Joseph. She it was who worked out the details of the religious life as practised in the Congregation, and who, reducing Julie's principles to practice, organised the methods of teaching for those whose capacity enabled them to devote themselves to the training of youth. The work was one fraught with difficulty and responsibility, but it was done with calm and serenity, in the manner of those who depend upon God for guidance and measure the things of time by the standards of eternity.

The first draft of the rules and constitutions of the Congregation had stood the test of practice for some fifteen years, and had given proof of its vitality and of its efficiency in raising to a high degree of perfection those who had followed it.

The crisis of Amiens had brought about the first attempt at a definite codification, but, as has been seen,

the opposition of M. de Sambucy had prevented its completion.

A second attempt had been made as soon as the Sisters were finally settled in Namur. This too had proved abortive for reasons connected, not with the ecclesiastical but with the civil administration.

The influence of Mgr. Pisani even could not procure from the Empire the recognition of a form of rule independent of its control, and rather than risk the very existence of the work, the Foundress had decided to postpone the moment of adopting a more complete organisation, and to continue for the time being to govern the Institute according to the general principles already in operation.

The delay, though indefinitely prolonged, was not fruitless. It afforded an excellent opportunity of putting the future rules to the test of practice, while at the same time, owing to the fervour of the Sisters, nothing was lost of the spirit of Mère Julie.

A new era, however, was dawning over the Low Countries, in consequence of political developments. The King, William of Orange, saw his throne endangered by the return of Napoleon to France, and sought to strengthen it by adopting a conciliatory attitude towards the Belgians. He issued a proclamation in which he announced his intention of devoting his energies unceasingly to the honour and protection of religion and support of the nobility, the encouragement of agriculture, commerce and industry.

The immediate result of this proclamation was to cause a flood of hope to surge up in the hearts of his subjects, and to enkindle a spirit of enthusiastic loyalty when they saw by the acts of the Government that it was not intended to remain a dead letter.

Waterloo came, however, and with it the fall of William's rival. The danger over, the privileges,

which had been granted less out of goodwill than as a measure of emergency, were once more suppressed, and the people felt they had been misled. Relations consequently became strained.

Mère St. Joseph was called to the helm of the Institute, as we have seen, in 1816, before this change of policy had made itself felt.

A cry of alarm had been raised, it is true, on the publication of the ordinance of May 10, 1816, "that Catholic worship should continue to be regulated by the Organic Articles," but only a few, of whom Mère St. Joseph was one, understood the anti-religious character of this move.

For the majority the "Organic Articles" were the same thing as the Concordat, and the Concordat had signalled the restoration of worship and the return to the religious beliefs of their fathers.

The apprehension which was aroused by this first intimation of a change of policy on the part of the Government was increased by the difficulties which arose in Ghent, where the Sisters of Nouveau Bois suffered the brunt of the persecution directed against the Bishop.

Mgr. de Broglie, it will be remembered, had already spent some months in exile, and had no sooner returned than he sounded the alarm and warned his flock against taking the oath to an impious Constitution.

He incurred in consequence the bitter hatred of the Government, he was once more banished and his effigy burnt.

The close of the year 1817 was overshadowed by these events, and from that time forward the Sisters of Ghent were regarded with some suspicion by the emissaries of William, on account of their sympathy with the Bishop. Thanks, however, to the good sense of the people, who recognised the inoffensiveness of

these poor teachers of the poor, no tyrannical measures were taken against them.

In the other towns where there were foundations of the Sisters of Notre Dame, the first few years of the Dutch rule passed without incident. Indifference in matters of religion had not yet given place to the sectarian spirit from which later the religious communities had so much to suffer, and Mère St. Joseph profited by the temporary peace to take up anew the task of drafting the constitutions of her Institute.

No portents comparable to those which marked the conception of the rule of St. Francis of Assisi at Fonte Columba, or of that of St. Ignatius in the Grotto of Manresa, signalised the initiation of the rule of Notre Dame. The length of the period during which it existed in an inchoate condition makes it the product of a slow evolution under the guidance of Providence rather than the outcome of a direct inspiration, and this is in perfect accord with the atmosphere of simplicity which is one of the marks of the Institute. God shows Himself nowhere more wonderful than in His selection of instruments for His work, and in the way He fits them for their appointed task, and guides them in its performance. Nor do we, who as parts can see but parts, understand His designs or His methods save in the retrospect.

“As we represent at once both Martha and Mary,” writes Mère St. Joseph, “it is fitting that our rules should be suitable to both one and the other,” and it is marvellous to see how perfectly she has realised the union of action and contemplation in the mixed form of religious life.

And if at any time the restless spirit of worldly activity should make its way into the Convents of Notre

Dame, if the active life should threaten to absorb the contemplative, it would be sufficient, in order to recall the religious to their primitive spirit, to remind them of this maxim of Mère Julie: "No sister of Notre Dame without the spirit of prayer."

Mère St. Joseph began her task by noting the government of Mère Julie in action. Not content with collecting the practices regarded in each house as traditional, she ordered that all the writings of the Foundress should be returned to Namur, and went through them herself to collect all the passages which were relevant to her purpose. She then examined the constitutions of the chief religious founders, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Sales and St. Ignatius. Her work bears traces of each, but it is from the last named that she borrowed most largely, and the master thought which runs through the entire code of rules is that which was crystallised in his famous maxim, "For the greater glory of God." "The Society of Jesus protected the cradle of the Sisters of Notre Dame," she would say.

Moreover, the chivalric spirit of the soldier saint is in perfect accord with the spirit of any congregation, whether of men or women, which is vowed to the apostolic life.

In the opening sentences of the constitutions the form of government which is to characterise the Institute is set down clearly and definitely, "The Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame is governed by a Superior General," and the principle for which the Foundresses had gone through months of struggle and sacrifice at Amiens is thus secured for all time. And looking back, the daughters of Mère Julie recognise that one of the greatest blessings God has granted to their Institute is the result of its exile from the city of its birth.

The end of the Association is the education of youth, and to this work the Sisters vow to dedicate their lives. While schools for the wealthy classes are not regarded as outside the scope of their labours, their predilection is for the poor, their spirit is to be a spirit of simplicity, of obedience and of charity, and their desire is, in the words of the Rule, to devote their labours to the poor of the most abandoned places.

In one respect the Institute of Notre Dame differs from most of the Congregations which had previously existed in the Church. As in its foundation the peasantry and the aristocracy of France were represented in the persons of the Foundresses, so throughout its history the barriers of class were to be ignored. Like the College of the Apostles, Julie's Institute should be drawn from every class of society, and further, there should be no distinction of choir and lay sisters. While each member should be appointed by the Superiors to the work for which she was best fitted, either scholastic or domestic, all the Sisters should meet in Community on an equality, as all contribute according to their varying aptitudes to the same work. Thus the tie which binds the Sisters is based on something deeper than the accident of birth, or even of mental attainment; each learns what the other has to teach, and the result is a mutual gain in experience and in strength.

The Rule, having laid down the lines upon which the general organisation of the Association is to run, and having provided for the formation of the religious, proceeds to lay down its prescriptions for the equipment of the teacher.

And here, wisely, provision is made for the development of studies which time renders inevitable, and while the principles laid down are invariable, there is sufficient elasticity to admit of the adoption of all that

is best in the new while safeguarding all that is essential in the old.

The talents and the eminent qualities of Mère St. Joseph shine out nowhere more clearly than in the wisdom of her administration. As in her humble dependence on her spiritual guide, Julie, she is a model for every subject, so in her motherly care for those under her she is a model for every Superior, and the happy relations between Superior and subjects in the Institute owe no small debt to the tradition of Mère St. Joseph's government.

In addition to the Rule, Mère St. Joseph compiled a *Directory* for the Spiritual exercises, and a book of *Customs* in which the details of the Community life were regulated so that the practices of the various houses of the Institute should be uniform. The code thus drawn up was truly a masterpiece of legislation. So wisely was it conceived that for the century and more during which it has been in operation it has never been found necessary to modify it in any important respect, and it has enabled the Institute to adapt itself to all varieties of peoples and climate.

One of the Sisters who lived at Namur at this period tells us in her notes that Mère St. Joseph took the Rule as the subject of her instructions, and that she made upon the Sisters such an impression of wisdom that they were full of admiration. She communicated to all the esteem she herself felt for the customs of the Institute.

A certain Sister Marie Albine was one of those chosen to make manuscript copies of the rule before it was printed. When she handed her completed copy back to Mère St. Joseph, the latter said to her, "May you be able at the hour of your death, clasping this little book in your hands, to say to God, 'O Lord, here is the history of my life.'"

The lesson was not lost. Sister Marie Albine proved herself a worthy daughter of such a mother. She aimed always at high ideals, and when the first group of Sisters were being selected for the foundations in the New World she begged to be included among them, and ended there her life of sacrifice and abnegation.

Father Girod, S.J., who was fully competent to judge, characterises the rule drawn up by Mère St. Joseph as being marked with supernatural wisdom and impregnated with that spirit of sweetness and of strength, of faith and of humility, which is her distinctive characteristic. "The rules are," he continues, "the most precious inheritance of the Sisters, the constant subject of their meditation, and, as it were, the Divine mould in which they are cast."

The rule, being definitely drawn up, was put into practice first of all at the Mother house, under the vigilant eye of the Superior General herself. After careful observation and mature deliberation with her Council, Mère St. Joseph had it put into force in the other houses, and the Superiors of these submitted their individual reports on its working.

After two years of such experiments the text of the rule was fixed and definitely adopted.

On September 8, 1818, Mgr. Pisani gave it his episcopal approbation and constituted himself its protector. M. Médard, his Vicar General, came to present it to the Sisters in his name, and reminded them that the perfection asked of them by God was contained in its observance.

This formal recognition of their rule was a source of great satisfaction to the Sisters. It set the seal of the Church's approval on the Congregation, and was a prelude to the Papal approbation which was granted to it by His Holiness Gregory XVI in 1844.

The religious life having been organised with a prudence which bore witness to the high degree of sanctity to which she had personally attained, Mère St. Joseph turned her attention to the training of the Sisters for the teaching work of the Institute.

The initiation of the rule of William of Orange brought about many changes in the educational system of Belgium.

Under Napoleon education had been the monopoly of the State. But either through indifference or through lack of foresight, the elementary schools set on foot by the Republic had been ignored. The result was complete confusion. In one place, we are told in an official report, a few fathers of families would appoint a schoolmaster who should relieve them of their children during the household labours of the winter, in another it was the curé who, with one of the chief people of the locality, would undertake the onerous selection. The candidates for the post were men who roved the country in search of a job—sometimes manual labourers who were at liberty because the crops were gathered in, sometimes masons, weavers and shoemakers, who would exchange for the time being their tools for the cane and the three Rs. They were engaged not for their learning, but for their cheapness; and if parents could not agree upon the choice, then the village would go without a schoolmaster for one or even for several years.

In 1812 a circular issued by the Principal of the University called attention to the lamentable condition of elementary education. An inquiry was set on foot, and measures were suggested for its improvement, but it was too late, the sceptre was already falling from the hands of Napoleon.

In 1814 the Treaty of Paris recognised the

sovereignty of the House of Orange in the Low Countries, and the Treaty of London reunited Belgium and Holland. In Holland elementary education had not suffered the long eclipse it had experienced in Belgium. While in the south the arbitrary reforms of Joseph II fell through, in the north a society called the Association of Public Utility was formed by a few men possessed of initiative with the object of improving and developing the education of the masses.

After 1814 Holland determined to raise the status of the Belgian schools to the level of its own, but the delicacy and tact necessary to handle the situation were lacking. The King and his counsellors knew well that to monopolise control of education was to secure unlimited power; their ambitious measures were regarded as an infringement of the liberty of the citizens and brought about a reaction in favour of free schools for the people.

The clear-sightedness of Mère St. Joseph was the safeguard of the Institute, whose very existence was often jeopardised during this critical period.

While she refused to allow the Sisters to accept the invitation of lay committees to conferences where no useful purpose was to be served, and refused further to adopt the books selected by the Government when these did not meet with her approval, she nevertheless allowed them to submit to examinations before lay examiners, an unusual concession in those days, and took every step to improve the efficiency of the schools, both by careful selection of mistresses and by procuring for these every educational advantage.

"Mère St. Joseph devoted jealous care to the novitiate," we are told by Sister Marie Cornelia, one of the pioneers of the Californian foundation, who was a novice during Mère St. Joseph's Generalate, "and

would frequently go to give religious instruction to her 'little white veils,' as she tenderly named them. She did not conceal from them that their vocation was a call to sacrifice, and that the spouse of Jesus Christ must exercise herself continually in mortification of heart and mind."

The training given in the novitiate, under the direction of Mère St. Joseph, was excellent, and the spirit of fervour reigned among its members. A Jesuit Father, who visited it from time to time, compared its spirit to that of the Jesuit novitiate in Rome, which was adorned by a St. Aloysius Gonzaga and a St. Stanislaus. High ideals, solid virtue, great aspirations characterised these young and earnest souls.

Their lives were not easy, especially under the rule of William of Orange. They were obliged to submit to many humiliating ordeals, to work unremittingly and to prepare themselves for qualifying examinations, while at the same time conducting a class. But they were full of spirit and undeterred by difficulties.

Mère St. Joseph, after the example of Julie, would have nothing narrow or petty about the Sisters, she wanted great and magnanimous souls, but souls at the same time trained to a deep humility. The novice mistress of those days, Sister Vincent, gives her own testimony to the fervour which reigned among the novices. "There was a holy thirst," she says, "for sacrifice and humiliation. I had not to urge them on, I had rather to moderate them. They had received an impulse towards sanctity. Moreover, these young religious were attracted towards the highest virtue by the example of Mère St. Joseph; to observe her was to receive a profound impression of consummate sanctity. In this chosen soul God had supplanted creatures and had established Himself as Master. It was impossible to note the conduct of our admirable

Mother without making a vigorous resolution never to hesitate in choosing the more perfect course."

Mère St. Joseph realised the supreme importance of this period of training—again and again in her correspondence we find her reiterating the same principle. "I would rather sacrifice a class," she writes to Sister Gudule at Fleurus, "than imperil the vocation and instruction of a novice. This," she adds, "was the view of our dear Mère Julie."

Though she was forced by circumstances occasionally to derogate from this maxim, she was determined not to allow a measure of exigency to develop into a custom. Once the Dutch yoke was broken there was a large increase in the number of postulants, and new foundations were suggested. But Mère St. Joseph would not hear of sending novices into secondary houses before their period of training was complete. "No," she would say, "let my little white flock be formed in peace. It is the ruin of any Institute to employ its novices before they are thoroughly trained. I was obliged to adopt this measure in the pressing need we were in under King William, but now I beg the Superiors not to put me to the pain of refusing them, for I will not give up a single one of my little white veils. I shall keep them all under my care."

The training of the Sisters as teachers was the necessary complement of their religious formation. Mère St. Joseph, we are told, worked unceasingly for the improvement of the schools. She studied and compared methods in order to secure thoroughness and efficiency, and while full of initiative and resource, she submitted all new plans to the acid test of experiment.

The retreats at the Mother house were always followed by conferences in which the Superiors and

class mistresses freely discussed matters of educational interest and compared notes, and at the close of the conferences Mère St. Joseph would draw up the plan of studies for the ensuing year.

The Sisters who were contemporary with her have left on record their testimony to the tender welcome Mère St. Joseph gave them when they returned to the Mother house during the summer holidays. "During the few weeks we passed at Namur we were literally overwhelmed with attention. What zeal, first of all, for our spiritual progress, then, after the retreat, what anxiety to keep us abreast of the times in matters connected with our teaching! And, on the other hand, what care for our health!" And then, when the time came for the Sisters to separate again, Mère St. Joseph was there in the courtyard to give a last word of encouragement to them as they dispersed.

But, whether they were at the Mother house or in secondary houses, all the Sisters felt that her interest followed them.

She would even ask for specimens of the work of the various classes to be sent to her at Namur, and would give a report on the progress made between one such inspection and the next. Even so small a matter as the handwriting of the Sisters received her attention. One day the Superior of Ghent received a sharp criticism on this matter. "I cannot resist saying a few words about the handwriting of the Sisters. Those who knew how to write well seem to have forgotten, and the others are not learning how to do so. Is there no one who is capable and who has the time to teach the others? Is there not, as far as possible, time to give to a daily practice?"

The suspicion with which the authorities regarded all private educational undertakings soon developed into open opposition. No expenditure of public money

was spared to secure the efficiency of the State schools, while private schools received discouraging reports. Yet in spite of all these difficulties the educational system organised by Mère St. Joseph weathered the storm, as it has weathered so many subsequent ones.

CHAPTER XV

ADVANCE IN SPITE OF OBSTACLES

CONTRARY to all expectation, the year 1816, which threatened to be disastrous for the Institute, closed with favourable auguries for its future. Besides the new foundations which had opened a wider field of labour to the Sisters, the promulgation of the rule excited the fervour of the Communities, and many promising novices were received at Ghent and at Namur. It seemed, moreover, that the Government regarded with a favourable eye the work of Julie Billiart and Frances Blin de Bourdon.

The Ministry of Public Instruction was elaborating its scheme for elementary education, and in the official programme a part was assigned to the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Mère St. Joseph had no illusions as to this benevolent attitude: it was convenient for the authorities to make use of a body already organised and equipped for the work; and she was quite prepared for a change of tactics once the Government had trained its own teachers. Capable administrator as she was, however, she had profited by the transitory calm to complete her formulation of the rule.

The schools which were in the hands of the Sisters received a temporary recognition, some of them even had a share in the public education rate. This grant, slight as it was, enabled them to face the expenditure, which that year, 1816, had been unusually heavy on

account of the failure of the harvest, the severity of the winter and the famine consequent upon the war. By the exercise of economy and foresight Mère St. Joseph succeeded in maintaining not only her numerous spiritual children, but several poor families who came to her in their need, and the records of her ingenious charity were discovered long after the difficulties of the time had passed into history.

The work that Mère St. Joseph was doing for the poor at Namur, her nephew Alexander, in the capacity of Mayor, was doing for Amiens. He succeeded in securing a considerable sum of money, partly levied on the royal purse, for the poor who were suffering from the famine. Thus aunt and nephew in their different spheres were carrying on the traditions of the family.

Early in 1817 the health of Mgr. Demandolx, Bishop of Amiens, gave way, and he died on August 14 of that year.

A strange circumstance is related in this connection. A few days before his death, while Mère St. Joseph was assisting at Mass, she suddenly felt her hand seized in a strong grip, as though someone was begging her help. The prayers of the Community had been asked, and both professed Sisters and novices had made a continuous hour's prayer for the intentions of their Superior. When the death of Mgr. Demandolx was announced, this impressive occurrence was at once associated with him in all minds, and everyone thought it was the last farewell of the Bishop.

Mère St. Joseph had Mass said for the repose of his soul, and required from the Sisters in his favour the suffrages which they were accustomed to offer for the deceased members of the Institute.

The charity which had held the rein over her tongue in his lifetime was not likely to slacken after his

death, and she spoke of him with such veneration and gratitude that some who listened to her were much astonished to hear subsequently that he had in the early days been hostile to the Foundresses of Notre Dame.

Mgr. Demandolx was attended on his death-bed by the exiled Bishop of Ghent, whose case was being tried at that time. The trial resulted in his condemnation, he was never rehabilitated, and the clergy of his diocese were subjected to persecution until his death at Paris in 1821.

In the autumn of 1817 negotiations were completed by the magistrates of Thuin in Hainault for the establishment of a girls' school under the care of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Thuin had formed part of the Principality of Liège ever since the ninth century, and had always had at heart the education of the people.

The inhabitants assembled in crowds in the market-place to welcome the Sisters, and as their carriage made its way in a sort of royal progress through the throng, Mère St. Joseph, who had come to preside at the foundation, bowed and smiled to right and left, and from the first moment won the hearts of all.

At the entrance to the convent the civic authorities were assembled to express their gratitude to the Superior General and their welcome to the little Community of four.

The house which was put at the disposal of the Sisters was a monastery built by some Franciscan refugees from Philippeville during the Franco-Spanish war. On the conclusion of peace these Franciscans were invited to return to Philippeville and were succeeded by Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, popularly known as the "Grey nuns." In 1796 the

Revolutionaries had suppressed the convent, but when the troublous times were over, three of these Grey nuns returned, and with another refugee resumed their double mission of teaching the children and nursing the sick. The work became too arduous for them, and in consequence the civic authorities asked for help from Namur. Immediately on their arrival the new-comers relieved the little community who had so long borne the burden and heat of the day. From the beginning the most perfect harmony existed between the Sisters of Notre Dame and the former little Community, and Mère St. Joseph returned from her journey into Hainault with a joyful heart, satisfied alike with the religious character of the building in which the Sisters were established and the excellent relations existing between them and the townsfolk.

Yet even here, where all seemed favourable, the work was to be marked with the Royal seal of the Cross, and we find Mère St. Joseph writing to the Superior of Thuin a few years later: "Your house was established on the Cross, and it appears that at the present moment it is renewing its life on the Cross. I have the greatest hopes of its success."

Mère St. Joseph was not mistaken in her estimate of the policy of the Government. The protection accorded to the religious orders in certain cases was but a screen to hide its deep-laid plans. William of Holland, from the moment that he ascended the throne, had not ceased to cherish the design of organising a Church of Belgium independent of Rome. The way had been opened to him by Joseph II and Napoleon, and he hoped to succeed where they had failed.

In May 1818, like a bolt from the blue, appeared two ordinances relative to the religious communities. These were further defined by a circular from the

Minister of Worship. Henceforth there were to be no houses of contemplative religious: these were of no use in the kingdom and they must disappear. As for the teaching congregations, they would be tolerated until the day when the Department of Public Instruction should be ready to function throughout the kingdom. The case of the nursing orders was different; for one thing, their devotedness excited neither jealousy nor competition, and for another, the State, which could command money but not personal service, could not hope to supply their place. They would be allowed to continue in existence, but under condition that they should nationalise themselves and submit their statutes for the King's approval.

The circular was immediately followed by a shower of official documents. By means of lists of indiscreet questions, demands for detailed statistics and forms of every kind, an attempt was made to sift the smallest public act of the Communities and even to lift the veil which screened their private life.

Every house of the Institute had its turn. The correspondence of the Superior General is filled with allusions to the difficulties of the new situation, but it shows us that Mère St. Joseph rose to the emergency without losing her habitual calm.

"Let us pray all the harder and renew our union in the Heart of Jesus," she writes to the Superior of Thuin. "A regiment thoroughly united and standing shoulder to shoulder is unassailable; it will face the enemy bravely. We must know how to march through good and bad weather, like brave soldiers of Jesus Christ. Be always gay and full of confidence in God—there is nothing but confidence to deliver us and to help us in our need, for in ourselves we are but poor weak creatures."

To another Sister who wrote complaining of the inconveniences resulting from this orgy of officialdom she answered: "St. Teresa said to her spiritual daughters what I say to mine: 'Look upon uneasiness and distress of mind as an imperfection only worthy of cowardly souls. We should avoid anxiety more than anything else, because nothing is more necessary than peace and quietude of mind.'"

For the moment it was, of course, impossible to consider any further foundations, but a new opening for her zeal was soon offered to Mère St. Joseph.

The position of Provincial of the Jesuits in Holland was at this time filled by a certain Father Wolff, who was anxious to secure for the rising generation the benefits of Christian education. For the space of three years he pondered ways and means, and asked God to realise his plan if it should be for His greater glory.

In 1819 two of his penitents showed unequivocal signs of religious vocations, and he looked upon this as an answer to his prayers.

Already the fame of the Sisters of Notre Dame had spread through Holland, and not only in ministerial but in religious circles it was well known that the Congregation founded by the saintly Mère Julie and her companion in Amiens, and subsequently transplanted to Belgium, was attracting to its schools children of all ranks, but especially the poor.

Urged by a supernatural inspiration Father Wolff came to see Mère St. Joseph. He told her that he purposed to found in Holland a congregation modelled on the Institute of Notre Dame, and begged her to help by training the subjects destined to form the corner-stones of the proposed edifice.

His request was favourably received, and, to render more prompt and more effective help, Mère St.

Joseph suggested that it would minimise the difficulties of language if the new postulants entered the Flemish-speaking novitiate at Ghent; then, later, when they had become familiarised with their new life, and had gained a working knowledge of French, they should be transferred to Namur, so that their formation should be under her personal superintendence.

Consequently, at the close of 1819, Mère St. Joseph welcomed at Namur the three Dutch postulants sent by Father Wolff, and suggested that it would be even better if their numbers could be increased to five or six, because after they had been thoroughly formed they would be sufficient to found a house in Holland, to receive new subjects and to spread as the Sisters of Notre Dame had themselves spread with the blessing of God. Her suggestion was gladly approved by Father Wolff, and seven Dutch postulants were trained at Namur from 1819 to 1824 for religious life and for teaching. One of them, Sister Antonia, died in the most fervent dispositions at Ghent after but six months of novitiate, and was allowed the privilege of making her vows on her death-bed.

When the period of training was complete, Father Wolff recalled his aspirants to Holland, and established them at Amersfoort. From this beginning three religious congregations arose and flourished—the Sisters of Notre Dame at Amersfoort, those of Mulhausen, and the Congregation of Jesus, Mary and Joseph of Bois-le-Duc.

In June 1810 a postulant, a native of Picardy, and the child of virtuous parents, had been received into the Institute. She took the name of Sister Gabrielle, was professed in August 1812, and in the following October was sent to Fleurus as mistress of the highest

class of the day school. No one, not even Julie herself, had succeeded in fathoming the depths of this secretive character. Her expression was inscrutable and gave no key to her disposition. She was intelligent and well informed, with a pleasant and attractive manner. In community she bore herself unassumingly, almost timidly, and the peculiarities of conduct which were occasionally noted were attributed to her apparent shyness.

She had no sooner arrived at Fleurus than her class achieved a success which was almost sensational, and parents and pupils alike showered compliments upon her. A few years passed, and gradually it became evident that under her impenetrable exterior great changes had taken place. She became insolent and haughty, a burden to herself and to others alike. Finally, she refused to approach the Sacraments, or to follow any of the exercises of Community life. The Superior of Fleurus, Sister Julienne, tried in vain to apply a remedy to a trouble she could not diagnose. In her charity she at first attributed the Sister's condition to some physical cause, but the doctor could not discover any malady. The symptoms becoming aggravated, it was at length judged necessary to make the Superior General acquainted with the serious aspect of the case. Mère Julie had herself gone to Fleurus to give the Sisters the encouragement of her presence. She could effect no improvement and returned sadly to Namur, saying to Mère Blin, "I feel that this Sister is in opposition to us."

She might, it is true, have dismissed Sister Gabrielle; this resource is allowed by the rule in dealing with a seriously recalcitrant subject; but both out of consideration for the victim's family and for fear also of driving the Sister herself to extremities, she did not wish to make use of this

extreme remedy. Prayers were offered on all hands, and the resulting improvement aroused hope of a radical cure.

While matters were at this stage, war broke out, and Fleurus and the surrounding districts were involved in the trouble. The Sisters were obliged to quit their house, which was invaded by a troop of straggling soldiers, and when the Community met again safe and sound, Sister Gabrielle was not the least fervent in her expressions of gratitude to God.

She remained in these dispositions until about the time of the death of Mère Julie. Then she became subject to sufferings which were quite abnormal and completely puzzled those who had care of her. Assistance at religious exercises became absolutely unbearable to her, and on various occasions she showed a tendency to self-destruction. The confessor refused to hear her confession, the Superior and the Sisters, obliged to be always on the watch, had no rest at all; the state of things became impossible.

Mère St. Joseph tried the effect of a change of surroundings by bringing her to Namur. At first this measure seemed to have produced a good effect, and Mère St. Joseph wrote to say, "Sister Gabrielle has not yet given us any trouble. She seems to be getting on very well for her. . . . Our dear Mère Julie has helped us in this matter."

Soon, however, the reports are less favourable. "I must tell you our poor Sister Gabrielle is not improving any longer. She is not troublesome but very much tried, and very suffering. Pray to the good God for us, my dear, we need it. . . . He will come to our help."

Three weeks later another letter shows that there had been no amelioration in the state of things. "The Sister I spoke of is no better," writes Mère St. Joseph.



Cathedral of St. Aubain, Namur.

“God be praised and show us His Will. It is a heavy cross.”

Another eighteen months passed before it became possible to understand the real nature of the trouble and to apply the appropriate remedy. It would indeed have been difficult to judge clearly in a succession of attacks which presented contradictory and almost preternatural symptoms: at one time the patient was seized with convulsive fits which looked like epilepsy; at another she was brought to death's door by an oppression of the chest which prevented her from breathing; then, when everyone was expecting each moment to be her last, she would come to life again, raise herself up without the slightest effort and exhibit all the signs of perfect health. During these attacks the only person who had any influence over her was Mère St. Joseph. The infirmarians were obliged, therefore, to send for her at any hour of the day or night. Her health naturally suffered from the strain and some apprehension was felt as to what new trial God was preparing for the Institute.

In December 1818 M. le Curé Neujean of Liège visited the Superior General. She had perfect confidence in him and told him of the state of Sister Gabrielle. This holy priest ever since his acquaintance with Mère Julie had cherished a tender devotion to the Sacred Heart. He promised to begin a Novena, and all the Sisters united their prayers with his. On the ninth day the symptoms changed somewhat in character and there appeared unequivocal indications that the mysterious malady was nothing else than a case of diabolical possession.

After due consideration and consultation permission was obtained to proceed to the customary ritual of exorcism. On March 24, 1819, Father Renson, a Franciscan and a canon of the Cathedral of St. Aubain,

with his assistant clergy began the difficult task. For four and a half months scenes of indescribable horror took place. All the ceremonial prescribed in the ritual, the use of sacramentals, sprinkling with holy water, contact with relics, only seemed to stir up the fury of the evil spirit and to augment the sufferings of the unhappy nun.

Adjured in the name of Jesus Christ to say why he was putting his victim to such cruel torture, the spirit answered that she had rendered herself unworthy of her vocation by continual infidelity to her rule. The fact was but too true, for though she had withdrawn from the world, Sister Gabrielle had lived as a worldlying and could not claim without reforming her life to die a religious.

During another of the ceremonies of exorcism Satan openly declared his hatred for Mère Julie and her Institute. He acknowledged that his aim was to destroy it, because it was snatching from him the souls of children; but to secure his end the health of the Superiors must be undermined and a number of vocations shattered.

Here, again, it seemed as if the powers of evil were likely to prevail. Mère St. Joseph, Sister Anastasie, the counsellors and the infirmarians were in a state of physical exhaustion; while, on the other hand, three highly capable mistresses caused much scandal by abandoning their religious vocations.

The summer of this year, 1819, was indeed a sad one for the Mother house. Public devotions in honour of Our Lady during the month of May were not then, as they are now, a common practice, but this devotion, universal in the Church to-day and traditional in the Institute, was inaugurated that year, and every day special prayers had been said to implore the intercession of the Queen of Heaven on

behalf of the Institute. Up to the first fortnight of August the situation was unchanged, but on the eve of the Assumption God was pleased to bring this long trial to a close.

Towards midday Sister Gabrielle, in secular dress, left the house secretly. Her flight was shrouded in mystery; no one ever knew how she had secured her disguise, or how she reached the street, for none of the portresses had seen her pass, and the doors were all fastened. The ex-nun confessed afterwards that an irresistible force had thrust her out. After she had crossed the threshold she felt herself freed from an unbearable yoke, but an invisible power prevented her return.

The fugitive was met in the town by an acquaintance who conducted her to the house of Canon Renson. Hearing where she was, Mère St. Joseph sent one of the older Sisters to conduct her to her own home. Her departure was a deliverance for the Community, but the evil spirit made his disturbing influence felt by the alarming and unearthly noises which for some days after were heard in the chapel during the time of night prayers.

Mère St. Joseph then assembled the Sisters in chapter and told them of the departure of Sister Gabrielle and as much as she thought wise to communicate to them concerning the possession. Many indeed had noticed the strange behaviour of the Sister, but their spirit of charity had prevented discussion. Now that her fate was known it served as a sad and terrible lesson: the Sisters redoubled their fidelity to the rule, the unwonted sounds were heard no more and calm reigned throughout the house.

In September the Superiors of the secondary houses met at Namur as usual for the annual retreat. Mère

St. Joseph gave them an account of the events of the year, and exhorted them to foster in the Sisters a spirit of humble obedience and fidelity to the practices established by the Foundress. In this way the Institute came out of its severe trial stronger and more fervent than ever.

The opportunity of doing good in concert with Father Wolff was its first compensation, and to Nouveau Bois fell the honour of playing the chief part in the good work. But the privilege was paid for by further trials. An epidemic broke out among the boarders; one of them succumbed to it, and many others were removed by their parents. The scourge fell upon the mistresses also, one after the other was stricken down, and the flourishing boarding-school became quite deserted.

To add to their troubles, in 1820 a fire broke out in the factory which still occupied part of the Abbey premises. In a few minutes the entire building was ablaze and the conflagration threatened to extend to the cloisters. The roof had already caught fire when a providential change of wind drove the flames in the opposite direction and saved the convent. As soon as the news reached Mère St. Joseph she hastened to Ghent to comfort the Sisters by her confident assurances that God would bring good out of evil.

And so it proved; for the destruction of the factory removed the apprehensions of many parents who considered its neighbourhood unhealthy for their children, and the school was soon once more filled with pupils.

It was about this time that a postulant from Courtrai was received at Ghent who was destined to be the successor of Mère St. Joseph in the Generalate.

Thérèse Joséphine Françoise Goethals was born in 1800, and was the youngest of eight children. Her

parents were socially distinguished, but their chief glory was the religious spirit which prevailed in the household and the truly Christian education given to their large family.

The exceptional gifts both of character and of intellect with which Thérèse was endowed predestined her to a brilliant future, while she was of an impulsive and ardent temperament which, though it had its dangerous possibilities, was, thanks to her excellent upbringing, the source of her future power.

She owed her early training to her mother, her father having died when she was only three years old; but later she was sent to the Convent of the Dames Anglaises at Ypres to complete her education. Returning home at the age of seventeen, a charming and accomplished girl, she became the idol of the family circle. Her kindness to the poor was remarkable, and she was a more familiar figure in their miserable dwellings than in the drawing-rooms she was so well fitted to adorn. She organised among her friends a committee of young ladies to relieve the necessitous, and helped her eldest sister in the work she had undertaken for orphan girls of the town.

From her early years Thérèse had determined to be a nun, and confided to the prioress of the Carmel of Courtrai, a relative of hers, her desire to be a Carmelite. The prioress, however, dissuaded her. "God destines you for the apostolic life," she said. "Go where He calls you." Thérèse talked over the matter with her uncle, who was Vicar General of the diocese, and then asked to be admitted as a postulant at Nouveau Bois.

The Sisters of Notre Dame were not strangers to her. Her home had always been noted for its hospitality, and more than once in her early childhood the hand of Julie had rested in blessing on her head.

The manner of her reception by the Superior of Nouveau Bois was calculated to test her sincerity. As they passed through the cloisters of the venerable Abbey, Mlle. Goethals remarked, "How beautiful everything is; I am sure I shall be very happy here." "Mademoiselle," answered the Superior austere-ly, pretending to misunderstand, "if you are coming here for the beauty of the walls, your vocation is not worth much, and you will not stay. Only mortified souls can find pleasure here. Our life is a life of labour and poverty; I doubt very much if you are suited to it."

Thérèse was not rebuffed. "Sister Superior," she answered, "if I have the happiness of being received into your Institute, I shall work so hard that you will see that it has all the qualities that please me."

She was received, and a few days later the Superior General visited Nouveau Bois. In their first interview the favourable impression made by their correspondence was deepened. In spite of the difference of age there was a real understanding and sympathy between the two, for both had received the same Christian training, and had cherished the same aspirations for the contemplative life.

Thérèse asked to have St. Ignatius for her patron in religion. "I will say 'Yes,'" replied Mère St. Joseph, "on condition that you become a second Ignatius in zeal and in virtue." "Ma Mère," exclaimed the ardent postulant, "I receive that injunction as a sacred engagement and shall hold myself always obliged to aim at its fulfilment."

The future bore witness to the sincerity of this resolution, which found its distant accomplishment in the vow of perfection by which she bound herself in later years.

The year 1820 opened brightly. The directors of

the charitable foundation known as the Girls' Sunday School asked the Sisters to take over the work. This institution had been founded by a pious and wealthy lady of Namur, in accordance with the injunction of the Council of Trent, to instruct poor children in Christian doctrine. Originally the school was opened on Sundays, hence its name, but during the course of the seventeenth century other bequests were added to the original foundation, and it was suggested that the scope of the undertaking should be widened to include the teaching of reading and writing, and later even the giving of technical instruction.

Up to 1820 the school was in charge of secular teachers; the man and woman who taught the boys and girls respectively at that date were old, the woman had already held the post for forty years, and the directors, to whose hands the nomination of teachers had been committed, proposed to put the boys under the care of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and to ask the Sisters of Notre Dame to take charge of the girls' school.

The undertaking was one after Mère St. Joseph's own heart. Two Sisters were appointed to go out daily to the school, and the sewing class which was attached to the Girls' department was after some years transferred to a portion of the convent building.

About this time, in view of the peculiar circumstances of the years following the Revolution, an unusual concession was granted by Mère St. Joseph to one of its victims. This was a nun who had been a member of the Community of the Benedictine monastery at Namur. After the destruction of her convent she had found a refuge for a time with relatives or with friends, but these had failed her one by one and she begged the favour of being received among the Sisters of Notre Dame. Yielding at last

to her entreaties, Mère St. Joseph allowed her to occupy with her attendant a little suite of rooms in the convent. She was over eighty years old and infirm when this favour was granted to her, and she only lived about six months afterwards, but she had enjoyed the privilege she had so much longed for, that of closing her long life under the roof of a religious house.

And now the Institute was entering upon a period of grave anxiety in its relations with the civil government. The apprehensions of Mère St. Joseph were more than justified by a measure which was promulgated to the effect that all religious Communities were to receive the royal authorisation or to be suppressed, and that the vows were not to be made for a longer period than five years.

Mère St. Joseph immediately presented a request for recognition on behalf of the Institute, and by way of supporting it, attached to it the approbation previously granted by Napoleon. A favourable testimonial from the hand of the Bishop, Mgr. Pisani, was instrumental in securing a speedy reply, which was received in July 1820. Instead, however, of putting an end to her anxieties the official document rather increased them, for it was found that the recognition was granted to the houses of the Namur province alone, thus excluding seven, and that none, even of the recognised houses, was allowed to make further foundations without authorisation.

A letter from Mère St. Joseph to the Superior of Ghent, dated September 4, 1820, explains the steps that had been taken, and the partial success with which they had met. No time was to be lost, for an announcement had been made that all Communities which had not received the official authorisation before the month of January should be dissolved.

Five weeks later we learn that a definite application had been made on behalf of the seven houses still unrecognised, but no reply had been received.

The condition of the houses at Liége, Thuin and Ghent was the more critical in that they were unable to secure episcopal influence in their favour. The see of Liége had been vacant since 1808, that of Tournai since 1819, the Bishop of Ghent was in exile, and the Vicars General so greatly in disfavour on account of their loyalty to him that they were actually imprisoned for five months on a charge of disturbing the public peace.

To complicate matters still further, a misunderstanding arose in regard to the approbation granted by Napoleon as far back as 1806.

At that date the constitution of the Institute was still in embryo, the exaction of State authorisation came suddenly, and to meet it a code of statutes had been drawn up by M. de Sambucy.

One of the articles of the code as submitted to the civil authorities ran as follows: "They are governed in each house by a Superior, an assistant and three counsellors, elected every three years by plurality of votes, in presence of an ecclesiastical Superior."

The discrepancy between this article and the actual practice in the Institute, whereby the secondary Superiors instead of being elected were nominated by the Superior General, led to a controversy and gave room for captious questioning on the part of the authorities. As a matter of fact, the article in question had never been put in practice, because at the time the document was drafted no written constitution existed, and the code of M. de Sambucy was merely re-submitted as a matter of form with the view of securing a confirmation of the previous recognition.

To the query raised Mère St. Joseph replied quite simply that the statutes in the form in which they had been presented to the French Government were only tentative, and that the article under discussion had been modified in the light of experience. She had, however, thought it necessary for the purpose of the present application to submit the statutes already approved in the form in which they had received approbation. "It seems to me," she writes to a Superior, "that they cannot find any mark of duplicity in us. It is clear that we had no intention of deceiving them, since we have always stated our manner of acting. We had no interest in hiding it. Besides, it is a matter of such indifference for the Government that I do not see where they could find any motive for deceit in it."

The incident was closed. But Mère St. Joseph was not by any means at the end of her difficulties. From the beginning of 1821 the Ministry of Public Worship and the Ministry of Education joined forces. The former pigeon-holed the request for approbation, jeopardising by this delay the very existence of many houses whose applications might not be dealt with in time, while the Ministry of Education, on the other hand, adopted precisely opposite tactics. Having completed the organisation of their own scheme, and being consequently independent of the religious orders, they adopted irritating methods which seemed devised to make negotiation impossible. Decree followed decree, each more exacting and more clearly hostile than the last.

In addition to the special authorisation necessary for the school, testimonials as to both character and capacity were now required from the teachers. This was followed by further legislation on July 22, 1822, exacting severe penalties from any unqualified person

who should take up the work of teaching. These regulations, it is true, were not put into immediate effect as regarded the religious orders, but they afforded pretexts for ceaseless and wearisome inspections, and Mère St. Joseph showed anxiety on the score of the houses which had not yet been approved.

The situation became more difficult every year. The teaching staff were first obliged to pass examinations conducted by inspectors, then, as though that were not sufficient, the fashion changed and they had to qualify a second time before a newly-formed Committee of Education.

Fortunately they were able to give a good account of themselves, and Mère St. Joseph remarks in November 1824: "Everything is going on very quietly so far."

The success of the "Sunday School" had been so marked that in 1822 Mère St. Joseph was asked to provide two more Sisters to undertake the direction of the orphans of the Hospice St. Gilles.

This Hospice had been under the direction of French nuns, who had been ousted by the Dutch Government on account of their nationality. The gravest disorder existed as a result, old people and children being herded together indiscriminately. The task was not an easy one for anyone who should undertake to restore order. But there was good work to be done and Mère St. Joseph accepted it.

The Sisters entered upon their duties in May 1823, their work, of course, being limited to the care of the orphans. They had some painful and difficult experiences, but their influence gradually made itself felt, conditions were ameliorated and discipline re-established.

In 1823 the governmental exactions increased, and the Religious Teaching orders were obliged to render

an account of their income and expenditure. The following year the Government arrogated to itself the right of determining the number of Sisters to be allowed in each house. Namur was allowed fifty, novices included ; Gembloux fourteen ; Dinant twelve ; Andenne five. The inconveniences resulting from this may be readily imagined. First it was necessary to give an account of all transferences from house to house, and no interchange was permitted between approved and non-approved houses, even in case of sickness or death. It was a measure calculated to stifle them gradually out of existence.

Everywhere the lack of sufficient help became pressing ; and to the already arduous task of administering the domestic affairs of her Institute, Mère St. Joseph had to add the burden of supporting and encouraging the Superiors, who were torn this way and that by the exactions of the local authorities.

The same year gave her fresh cause for apprehension in the suppression of all the establishments conducted by the Brothers of the Christian schools, and the Sisters wondered how long their own fate would be delayed.

Certainly circumstances were threatening. It was becoming almost impossible to receive new subjects. "As to the postulants," wrote Mère St. Joseph to the Superior at Ghent, where the Flemish novitiate was established, "let them wait a little longer before they take the habit. They must not be troubled about this, for the worst they have to fear is that they may be obliged to dress as seculars."

And all this while, requests for new foundations were coming in from Flanders and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and all had to be refused.

On March 29 the Superior of Thuin wrote to the Superior General to say that a royal decree had been

issued to the effect that all houses which had not received official authorisation before August 1 would be suppressed.

The overtures made in 1820 had therefore to be renewed, and it was Mère St. Joseph herself who undertook the responsible task of preparing the petitions. "May God bless them," she said, as she sent them off, "and give them success. We must adapt ourselves in every way to these exigencies so as to have nothing to reproach ourselves with if they fail."

The most striking feature of the letters written at this time by Mère St. Joseph is indeed the note of calm and self-possession which characterises them.

Yet everything was calculated to disturb her peace, not only the arbitrary measures of the Government, but the heavy toll which death was exacting during these trying years. The loss of her only sister, Mme. Felix, in 1821, and of her childhood's friend, Mme. de Franssu, in 1824, broke the chief links which bound her to the world outside the convent; while it seemed as though all the Sisters who had lived through the early days of the Institute with her were destined to precede her to the tomb.

The Institute lost in 1819 an excellent novice mistress in the person of Sister Claire Lesergent; still more personal to Mère St. Joseph was the death of Sister Gertrude Steenhaut, the enthusiastic Ciska whom M. de Sambucy had in vain sought to detach from Mère Julie. She died Superior of Gembloux at the early age of thirty, having passed just half her life in the convent. Her constant prayer was that she might suffer her purgatory in this world, her constant surprise was to find her path strewn with roses. Even the severe suffering she endured for three years before her death had no power to quell the gaiety of her spirit, which refused to regard her illness as incurable

and treated it rather as a matter for a light-hearted jest. She was completely resigned to God's Will, however, for death or for life, and the tribute paid to her by her Superior General was, "Gembloux has lost its pearl of price, which it will not be easy to replace."

More difficult still was it to find a successor to Sister Anastasie Leleu, the assistant of Mère St. Joseph and Superior of the Mother house, who died on February 9, 1823.

None was so closely united to the two Foundresses as Sister Anastasie. She had been one of that little band who made their vows in the first house of the Institute, that of the rue Neuve at Amiens; she had shared the trials of those early days and the banishment from France, and when God called Julie to Himself, the first act of Mère St. Joseph had been to nominate this faithful friend to the post of her assistant.

The Sisters always rejoiced in the fact that the Mother General had in Sister Anastasie a sympathetic and competent helper, but they were far from suspecting that Mère St. Joseph, whose health was growing frail, would survive one who was so much her junior.

The shock was great, therefore, when an unexpected relapse at an advanced stage of convalescence from typhoid fever carried her off. Mère St. Joseph felt the sacrifice intensely, though she showed in the midst of her grief a conformity to the Will of God which compels admiration. Even three years after she confessed that she had not been able to bring herself to write the account of Sister Anastasie which was customary in regard to the Sisters who died. "The first year," she said, "my feelings were too keen, and after that I was held back by the difficulty of describing her virtues in a way which would satisfy either the Sisters or myself." Even when she did

write she was almost incoherent. "What shall I say of her? How shall I qualify her? Charity, purity, simplicity, sweetness, thoughtfulness, is her name, for it is that which describes her to each of us. We had thanked God so often for the gift of her. But, alas! He had only lent her to us for a comparatively short time. . . ."

The sorrow expressed for her death was not confined to the convent: messages of sympathy were received from far and near, from the lowly as well as from the great.

But if Mère St. Joseph was not consoled, she was at least distracted from her grief by her anxieties. Sister Anastasie had to be replaced; the post was a responsible one, and owing to the abnormal conditions, changes from one house to another were difficult.

After some consideration and much prayer Mère St. Joseph summoned to Namur the Superior of Thuin, Sister Marie Thérèse. The new assistant proved herself worthy of the choice and rendered valuable help to the Superior General in regard both to the internal affairs of the Institute and to its relations with the civil power.

A new difficulty arose from this quarter: it was proposed to eliminate all French subjects from the religious orders. All French Superiors were ordered to take out papers of naturalisation, and no French teachers were allowed to hold posts in any school in the country. "Under these circumstances," wrote Mère St. Joseph to the Superior of Ghent, "you would be rendering great service to the Institute and to me by coming to take my place if it is the Will of God."

But the Institute would not consider such a proposal and appealed directly to the King. In response, King William signed with his own hand the document of naturalisation of Mme. Françoise Blin de

Bourdon on 27th December, 1824, and the Governor of Namur sent it to her, accompanied by a gracious message, as a New Year's gift.

And so the year 1824 closed with thanksgiving to God. In spite of all obstacles the Institute had grown. No house had been suppressed, the schools had increased; at Namur itself, among others, there were four hundred children in the free school, and more than eighty day boarders, while the number of boarders was so great that it overtaxed the existing accommodation, and the remaining portion of the Boneffe quarter was bought to admit of extension.

Vocations had not failed in spite of the difficulties, and Mère St. Joseph had reason to hope that not even the harshest and most uncompromising legislation would succeed in reducing the Institute to stagnation or to death.

CHAPTER XVI

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

THE reputation of the Institute of Notre Dame had spread throughout Belgium, and had come to the ears, among others, of Prince de Méan, Archbishop of Malines.

One day this prelate, being in Namur, called at the rue des Fossés and visited the different departments of the Mother house. He was favourably impressed with all that he saw both of the Community and the schools, and begged for a foundation in his diocese, which he complained had been overlooked.

“As far as we are concerned,” replied Mère St. Joseph, “we are entirely at Your Grace’s disposition, but the project might not meet with the favour of His Majesty. Just at present we are trying to attract as little as possible of the royal attention.”

The attitude of William of Orange towards education was indeed growing more and more despotic. By gradual stages he had already subjected to his authority the more advanced and the primary education, but he had so far forbore to interfere with the intermediate stages, a step which, as involving the *Petits Séminaires*, would have brought him into conflict with the clergy. When, however, he found that the Liberal party among the Belgians were on his side, he hesitated no longer, and in 1825 he suppressed the *Petits Séminaires* and re-established the College of Philosophy, the rock on which Joseph II had foun-

dered. These measures were not sufficiently sweeping, for the Catholics could evade their secularising effect by sending their children to the Catholic Colleges of the adjoining countries. A decree was therefore passed that no Belgians should be allowed to attend the Universities, or should afterwards be admitted to hold public or ecclesiastical office, if they had been educated outside the national system.

A burst of indignation greeted the announcement, and the entire hierarchy made a strong protest, but the outcry was of no avail; the King remained unmoved, and the only effect of the opposition was to increase the assiduity with which the previous vexatious measures were applied.

Those who have no first-hand acquaintance with conventual life are prone to regard with suspicion what they find it difficult to understand, and to fall easy victims to the misrepresentations of its calumniators. And, whether or not this widely prevalent ignorance was played upon by malicious persons for political ends, sinister whispers began to be circulated among the King's ministers as to the mysterious things which went on in convents. The royal conscience seems to have been aroused to a high degree of sensitiveness, and though this momentous matter was not actually referred to the Senate, orders were given to the governors of provinces to conduct a thorough investigation into the state of affairs and report to the King.

In the face of this injunction the governors appealed to the Bishops. Mgr. Pisani, in spite of his eighty years, had lost nothing of his Gallic wit. His replies were drawn up with such delicate irony that the sense of proportion was restored, and the inquisition ended in a burst of laughter. Mère St. Joseph realised, however, that the affair was but a straw



Mgr. Pisani, Bishop of Namur.

which showed how the wind was blowing. "We live in difficult times," she said, "and we must try to draw upon ourselves the Holy Spirit of God with all His gifts. He alone can guide our barque safely through the perils which beset it." All too soon her presentiments were justified.

The first steps were taken against the "approved" houses, which were made the subjects of domiciliary visits, carried out with a sinister air of suspicion, to ensure that the number of Sisters did not exceed the prescribed limit. Official lists of text-books were published and steps taken to enforce their use. In this difficulty the Superiors appealed to Mère St. Joseph, who issued a definite regulation that no book might be used in the schools of Notre Dame which had not received episcopal approval.

Since, further, it had been made necessary for the members of a teaching Congregation to hold a certificate of efficiency, Mère St. Joseph had appointed Sister Stéphanie to prepare all the Sisters destined for this branch of the work to pass the necessary examination. Out of courtesy the Governor of Namur dispensed the Sisters from attending with the secular teachers at the Town Hall, and examinations were conducted at the convent.

To the gratification of Mère St. Joseph these were crowned with complete success, and all the Sisters who presented themselves obtained the necessary qualification.

The position of the Superior General had, as we have seen, been brought into conformity with the new legislation against foreign Superiors, but in the case of several of the secondary Superiors the necessary measures were not taken in time, and in consequence the Superior of Gembloux received an order to quit the town within twenty-four hours.

Having satisfied itself as to the nationality of the Superiors, the Government turned its attention to that of the subjects. Once more Gembloux was among the victims, and an order was given for the removal of Sister Angélique. At Andenne, too, Sister Adèle, an excellent class mistress, was obliged to resign in favour of a Belgian sister, because, though she had been brought to Belgium at the age of three or four months, she had been born in France.

Mère St. Joseph was in distress. The result clearly aimed at by such legislation was to starve the Institute out of existence. On the one hand the difficulties attending on the reception of new subjects were almost insuperable, and on the other all French subjects were to be eliminated. Now in almost every house the French Sisters were not only a numerical majority, but, more important still, they were among the most thoroughly formed and most fervent of the Sisters. They had drunk at the fountain head of the Institute, and all the younger Sisters looked upon them as models of fidelity to the primitive spirit.

Prudence suggested the adoption of a strong course of action, and events for a time pointed to removal from Belgium.

The personal friends of Mère Blin in France had not weakened in their attachment to her, and still desired to recall the Institute, which had been driven away in 1809.

One day a French Bishop who was on a visit to Mgr. Pisani called at the convent. After Mass he was conducted to the Community room where the Sisters were assembled. To Mère St. Joseph he said: "Ah! you are Mère Blin de Bourdon; I am well acquainted with your noble family." He then went on to beg for some Sisters for his diocese. "You

belong to us by right," he said, "you cannot deny your origin; you should seek your last resting-place where the cradle of the Institute was established." "Ah!" subtly retorted Mgr. Pisani, who accompanied him, "when the Institute begins to show signs of decadence it may breathe its last wherever it will, but as long as it is alive and vigorous the Bishop of Namur will cling to the children God has given him." The reply was characteristic and worthy of so generous a friend. When the French Bishop raised his hands in a farewell blessing, he said with fatherly tenderness to the Sisters: "Live on, increase and multiply and extend into every country, not forgetting our own France."

In 1825 it seemed for a time as if the suggestion regarding France would materialise. The Viscount Blin de Bourdon, nephew of Mère St. Joseph, was at that time Prefect of the Department of Pas-de-Calais, and was keenly interested in the project of the priests of St. Omer to obtain a foundation of the Sisters of Notre Dame in that town. Coming at a moment when the outlook in Belgium was clouded with uncertainty, the request seemed like an indication of God's Will. Yet Mère St. Joseph did not decide hastily. She determined to consult the French members of the Institute, for upon them would devolve the responsibility of the new foundation. In the circumstances an establishment in France could not be made without risk. There was every possibility that the Dutch Government might demand the repudiation of any Superior residing outside Belgium, as it had done recently in the case of the Brothers of the Christian schools, and France, by way of reprisals, might make similar conditions.

The hopes of those in France who were interested in the question began to run high. The Viscount

Blin de Bourdon secured the support of the Bishop of Arras, which was necessary for a foundation at St. Omer, and obtained from the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs a promise of the royal approbation for the Kingdom of Charles X, while the Abbé Joyet, principal of the College of St. Omer, wrote on June 16 of a suitable house which he had in mind, and begged Mère St. Joseph to come and consider the whole question on the spot. It was not judged wise, however, for anyone so well known as Mère St. Joseph to take this step; two other Sisters, Sister M. Thérèse, the Superior Assistant, and Sister Emmanuel, the ex-Superior of Gembloux, went instead, and in secular dress, returning at the end of July full of enthusiasm for the proposed foundation.

Meanwhile in the Low Countries the religious situation was becoming more and more serious. The Sisters were obliged to submit to the presence of a Government representative at the ceremony of profession which took place at the close of the general retreat in September, and when the schools reopened in October, although the Brothers had been willing to make every concession in their power, their places were filled by young men who had just left the universities, and who were without either religion or pedagogic experience.

When this decision was announced to M. Médard, the Vicar General, protector of all the Catholic educational institutions of the diocese, he was profoundly distressed. "If ever they should interfere with the Sisters," he said in his emotion, "it would kill me."

He little expected that his end was so near, for he was not ill, and had said Mass as usual, but at three o'clock the next morning he had a heart attack which carried him off in a few minutes.

His death was a heavy blow to the Institute. Ever since he had been appointed its protector he had shown himself devoted to its interests, and his advice and help had been invaluable to the Mother General in the difficulties in which she had been involved with the secular government. Humanly speaking he was indispensable to her. But God's ways are not our ways. "The Lord gave him to me," she wrote to the Superior of Dinant, "the Lord has taken him away; blessed be His holy Name."

A still greater trial awaited her. The next year, 1826, deprived her, not only of her most trusted counsellor and kindest friend, Mgr. Pisani, but also, in the month of October, of her beloved brother, who died suddenly at Gézaincourt. By the death of Mgr. Pisani the Church in Belgium was bereft of one of its two remaining Bishops. Since 1819 the country had been made to suffer for its loyalty to Rome by being deprived of successors to its vacant sees. Mgr. Pisani was eighty-three years of age at the time of his death, and the health of the Archbishop of Malines was precarious. Under these circumstances the grief of Mère St. Joseph for the loss to the ecclesiastical organisation, it may well be imagined, was greater than for her personal loss.

At Namur the work of the Sisters was manifestly blessed during this time of trial; and the number of the pupils in the free school steadily increased, so that it became necessary to provide further accommodation by adding another storey to the existing building.

In 1826 the period of ten years which Mère St. Joseph had assigned as the limit for the Generalate drew to a close, and she hoped to be allowed to lay down the burden of office. Very naturally, however, the Sisters re-elected her, feeling that her ability and

experience were a sheet anchor in the difficulties through which they were passing.

Towards the end of October of the same year another friend and benefactor of the Institute passed to his reward. This was the Abbé Jean François Pierlot, who had been, under the name of Brother Gregory, the forty-second and last Prior of the monastery of Oignies. Driven from his religious home by the Revolution, he had entered the ranks of the secular clergy, and while holding a post as curate in Jumet, filled also the office of chaplain to the Sisters there. At Jumet he had made the acquaintance of the Foundresses, for whom he had conceived much esteem, and to whom he had rendered important services. During the Napoleonic wars he had penetrated the enemy lines more than once to bring to Namur tidings of the condition of the other Belgian houses, which he visited under the disguise of a peasant, and to the Sisters he presented the precious collection of relics which had been in the possession of his monastery since the thirteenth century.

The donor of these was the famous Jacques de Vitry, who had been taken from his humble cloister at Oignies and raised to the dignity of Cardinal Archbishop of Tusculum, and who showed his persistent devotion to his monastic home by the benefits both spiritual and temporal which he lavished upon it. In the same monastery dwelt Brother Hugo, who was a genius in metal work, and devoted all his talent to making worthy caskets and reliquaries in which to enshrine the gifts of the Cardinal. During the Revolution these were carefully hidden from the hands of the spoilers by a worthy couple who were devoted to the monks, and in 1817 the hiding-place was opened in the presence of M. Pierlot, and the



Reliquary from the Oignies Collection
(Now in possession of the Sisters of Notre Dame).

treasure duly restored to its rightful owner. The following year they were presented to Mère St. Joseph and transferred to Namur, where they were received with great pomp and devotion by the Sisters.

While as a matter of prudence all the Belgian houses had applied for the royal authorisation, it happened accidentally that the houses which were deprived of this blessing were the happier. For though their situation was precarious, they were spared the tiresome inquisitory documents which strewed the tables of the Superior and her secretary in the houses which basked in the sunshine of the King's approval, and of which three copies had to be submitted, to the King, to the Ministry and to the Regency respectively. "This is what comes of keeping in close touch with our Royal Tutor," the Sister secretary used to say smilingly.

In order not to be taken unawares, Mère St. Joseph had advised the Sisters who composed the teaching staff of the non-approved houses to present themselves for examination. The circumstances under which the necessary certificate was obtained varied according to the dispositions of the local officials. While at Namur these treated the Sisters with courtesy and consideration, at Liège the inspector refused to examine the Sisters at all, fearing to compromise himself by granting a qualification to Frenchwomen. In Luxembourg the diploma was only valid for two years, after which a new examination had to be taken, without any consideration for age or experience. The presiding examiner at Ghent was under considerable obligations to the Goethals family, but he was far from showing any favour to Sister Ignace Goethals and her companion on this account. These two Sisters were obliged to attend at the Government

offices with a crowd of secular candidates of both sexes, and to undergo an even more severe examination than was usual.

The Community of St. Hubert consisted of five Sisters who spared themselves no trouble in carrying on a growing boarding school and large classes of day scholars. The local authorities highly appreciated their work, but the Governor was determined to carry out all his instructions to the letter, and ordered the dismissal of the Sister who had been the last to join the Community. Foreseeing that this line of action would become general, Mère St. Joseph devised a plan to meet it. She enlisted the services of the most gifted and most loyal of the former pupils of the boarding schools, who gladly took the places of the Sisters for a time in order that the work of the schools might be carried on without further interruption.

The next dismissal ordered by the civil authorities was that of the Superior of Fleurus, on the ground of her French nationality. She returned to Namur to the hospitable arms of the Mother General. But here arose a further difficulty. For the number of Sisters at Namur was limited to fifty, novices included, and in consequence every extra place among the professed Sisters entailed the sacrifice of one in the novitiate, and this procedure threatened in yet another way the existence of the Institute.

A providential escape from the difficulty offered itself. Mère St. Joseph was asked to undertake the direction of the hospital of St. Jacques. The work was a little outside the lines contemplated in the Institute, but it afforded scope for zeal, and the ex-Superior of Fleurus, with another French Sister, entered upon their duties there in October 1826.

About the same time a redistribution of functions

in the Ministry placed the charge of the direction of Catholic worship in the hands of the Minister of the Interior. The measure eliminated the rigid M. Goubau, but his place was taken by officials so ingenious in raising difficulties as to make even his departure a subject for regret.

Early in 1827 a further move was made by the anti-Catholic Ministry. All proprietors of chapels were ordered to close their doors to the public. After two days, however, an ingenious Belgian discovered a legal flaw in the decree, the chapels were reopened and were not again closed.

The re-establishment of the College of Philosophy and its substitution for the *Petits Séminaires* had roused a strong protest, and the Government, which had even contemplated at that time a complete schism from Rome, had abandoned the project on realising the strength of the Catholic opposition. The King now returned to the idea of a Concordat. Probably he hoped that the renewal of the negotiations would set at rest the fears of the Catholics, while the delay which would almost certainly intervene before they were terminated would give him time to concert his own measures. If this was his hope he was disappointed. The Pope, Leo XII, was eager to put an end to the difficulties of the Church in Belgium and brought the affair to a speedy conclusion.

If King William had succeeded in calming one section of his subjects, it was at the cost of rousing another. The Dutch Calvinists and the Belgian Liberals began to show their disapproval. To satisfy them, a circular was sent to all the provincial governors stating that in spite of the Concordat no change would be made in the educational system.

The Minister of the Interior soon showed his hand.

He began to apply to the non-approved houses the same treatment as was meted out to those condemned to extinction. Jumet, Fleurus, St. Hubert, Liège, Ghent and Zèle were each ordered to dismiss one, two, or even four Sisters. Everywhere except in Flanders the local authorities petitioned the King on behalf of the Communities, and by that means gained time. Mère St. Joseph with undaunted faith betook herself to prayer. When the Sisters were gathered together for the Retreat in September, she solemnly consecrated the Institute to Our Lady, Help of Christians, and under the same patronage the schools were reopened in October.

Once again prayer availed to save the threatened Institute. There was at Verviers a family named De Biolley, well known in the business circles of the town and in great esteem for their admirable methods of dealing with their employees.

A daughter of this family, Marie Claire de Biolley, familiarly known as Mlle. Clary, had devoted herself to the educational interests of the children of the working classes. In 1820 she began to gather them together at her own house, and to teach them catechism and needlework. Having little experience in such matters, she visited the schools of Notre Dame at Liège, and saw there in actual operation the kind of work she wanted to initiate. She immediately begged the Superior to plead the cause of Verviers with Mère St. Joseph. The Superior did this with such success, that after visiting Verviers Mère St. Joseph promised to send four Sisters there, provided the royal approval could be obtained.

The family of De Biolley was influential, but the Ministers who surrounded the King were strongly opposed to any Catholic foundation.

It would have taken more than this, however, to daunt a person of Mlle. Clary's character. From the Governor she was referred to the Minister of the Interior, and from him to the Regent. Finally she decided to appeal personally to the King. On May 18 she received a favourable reply from His Majesty. He allowed her to associate with herself three or four Sisters of Notre Dame for the space of three years on the express condition that no other branch of the Institute of Notre Dame should be established in the town.

The little group of Sisters was conducted to Verviers by the Superior General on November 27, and installed in the house of Mlle. Clary herself. The family conceived the highest esteem for Mère St. Joseph, and the happiest relations existed between the Institute and the temporal foundress of the Verviers house. Though Mlle. de Biolley moved in the most exclusive circles, she was totally untouched by the spirit of the world. In her early years she had longed to find herself called to the religious life, but recognised that God had not granted her that vocation. She begged Mère St. Joseph to allow the Sisters to address her as Sister Claire, and was known by that name during the five years of her association with the Community at Verviers.

While the negotiations in regard to Verviers were being carried on with such signal success, the petitions on behalf of the non-approved houses were making but slow progress towards the royal audience chamber. The Sisters were going on with their work as if they were sure of the future. But the clouds were gathering overhead, and before long the storm burst.

Early one morning the police descended upon the convent at Ghent. The scholars were already

assembled, and the catechism lesson was going on. Four of the mistresses who were actually engaged with their classes were expelled forthwith from the house. They took refuge in the *Béguinage*, but they did not venture to stay there long. As soon as opportunity offered they fled, disguised as seculars, from the pursuit of the anti-clericals.

At the critical moment God sent across their path an excellent Catholic, M. Gobert, who had shown himself before this a champion of religious in distress. In the time of Napoleon he had saved the Belgian province of the Jesuits by offering to them his country house as a secret novitiate. He behaved in the same way towards the persecuted Sisters of Notre Dame, not only offering them the hospitality of his home, but even procuring for them from time to time the means of revisiting their Community. After three months of this mode of life they ventured to return quietly to the convent.

The domiciliary visits of the civil authorities had still to be endured at short intervals, but the calm dignity of the Superior of Nouveau Bois brought her safely out of such encounters. "Our numbers are just the same as before," she replied on one occasion, and the official did not inquire more definitely into the meaning of the word "before."

The houses in Hainault were persecuted in similar fashion. Three mistresses were dismissed from Jumet, and two others fell under suspicion of making the boarding school a hot-bed of conspiracy.

The truth of the matter was that their influence had brought about one or two conversions among the families of their pupils. For some months no further step was taken by the Government, then it was discovered that one of the Sisters in question, Sister



Mère Ignace Goethals,
3rd. Superior General of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Ignace, had been received after the non-approved houses had been forbidden to receive new subjects. The second Sister who had incurred the same suspicion, Sister Constantine, was expelled in October of that year.

The number of mistresses in the boarding school was now reduced to two, but Mère St. Joseph saved Jumet as she had saved St. Hubert, by the devotedness of the former pupils, and Sister Ignace was practically still its directress. "We are like earth-worms," wrote Mère St. Joseph sadly, "which are cut to pieces, and which join themselves together again." The vivid simile pictures the vitality of the Institute; while at the same time it gives us some idea of the agonising anxiety of its Superior General.

The spirit of Sister Ignace was not broken by her dismissal from Jumet; she had no fixed home, but she went from one house to another, wherever she could give help in any form. Her journeys now and again took on the character of an adventure. One day she was travelling in the diligence to Jumet. Among the passengers were two men who were holding an excited conversation in low tones, not so low, however, but that the name of Mlle. Goethals, and their hostile intentions in her regard, were overheard by the peasant woman who sat next to them, her heavy sabots covered with mud and her cotton cape soaked with rain. The peasant gave no sign that she had understood, but quietly left the diligence at the first stop and returned to Namur. It was Sister Ignace, and when the officers arrived at Jumet in the confident expectation of arresting her in the very act of teaching treason, they met with a disappointment to which they had unconsciously contributed.

The energy and zeal of Sister Ignace did much to save the houses of Hainault, but they left their mark

upon her constitution, and without any doubt shortened her life.

The same nomadic form of existence was imposed for two years upon Sister Gudule, who had succeeded the expelled Superior of Fleurus. In that town a pamphlet had been published in which the King and his Ministers were held up to scorn. The pamphlet was anonymous and the secret of its authorship was never discovered, but it was sedulously circulated and was in all hands.

It occurred to the baffled searchers after its author that no one could have been in possession of the very exact and detailed information it contained of the wrongs perpetrated by the Government but the Sisters of Notre Dame, and without further evidence they accused Sister Gudule of having written it, and sent her back to Jumet.

The danger which threatened the Institute from Thuin was, as we shall see, of a different nature, and came not from foes without but from friends within. Though Thuin was also unrecognised and its existence illegal, the Sisters had good and influential friends who steered them safely through the troubled waters. The specious suggestion was made by some of these friends that each of the non-approved convents should seek recognition as an independent house. The proposition had its supporters and its opponents; even within the Institute there were some who excusably saw in it a way out of their difficulties. Mère St. Joseph regarded it as a compromise which would fail to produce the good aimed at, and under the fair appearances of which was hidden the danger of a complete breach in the Institute. "We must hold together," she said, "that is the judgment of wise persons, and I think, too, that the good spirit which

has led us so far would be destroyed." She was ready, however, to make concessions for the sake of a greater good, and showed herself unwilling to ask too much of human nature. "If a choice has to be made between death and a lingering illness," she wrote to the Superior of Thuin, "illness often seems preferable. But I hope we shall not be reduced to that extremity. Do not let us be too much alarmed about it, let us trust Our Lord, we only want what He wants, and nothing will happen without His permission."

Her heroic courage and trust had, however, overcome the worst of its trials. The political quarrel between the King and his Belgian subjects distracted the attention of his Ministers from the persecuted convents, and the Institute was saved.

It is difficult to understand the attitude of William of Orange towards the different sections of his subjects. He had already to cope with the antipathy of the masses, upon whom he had been thrust as sovereign against their will; he had adopted a policy of oppression in regard to the Catholics, and now he alienated the goodwill of his last supporters, the Liberals.

The result was the formation, in November 1828, of the "Union of Parties for the Redress of Wrongs," which led two years later to the Belgian revolution. The Catholics demanded liberty in educational matters, the Liberals the freedom of the press, complaining that the Belgians had been "muzzled like dogs."

Two vigorously conducted campaigns were organised, and thousands of signatures representing the disaffected of all classes were appended to the petitions. These petitions were the object of fierce discussion in the two Chambers, and the uncompromising attitude of the Union wrung several important concessions

from King William. He entered into negotiations regarding the nominations to vacant sees, and made attendance at the College of Philosophy optional.

In June 1829 he resolved to make a tour of Belgium in order to test for himself the temper of the people in his regard. Everywhere he was well received, and Mère St. Joseph suggested to the Superiors that the moment was opportune for securing the royal approbation for the Institute.

The local authorities in most cases entered heartily into the project and did all they could to favour it.

The first Superior to come into contact with His Majesty was the Superior of Thuin, to whom he accorded a gracious reception.

Passing on to Charleroi he was presented with a petition from the Sisters of Jumet, while at Fleurus he was met by a host of children with their mistresses, for the Sisters had been told by the local magistrate to conduct the children of all their schools, rich and poor alike, to a point on the route of the royal procession, and there he himself in the name of the entire administration presented the request for recognition.

At Liège and at Verviers similar functions took place, until at last one of the members of the King's suite drily remarked, "There is nobody to be seen anywhere except Sisters of Notre Dame."

Neither at Ghent nor at Zèle were any of the leading citizens courageous enough to raise their voices on behalf of the Institute, and consequently no demonstrations took place in those towns.

The short stay of the King at Namur, however, brought the Mother house the honour of its first royal visit. The account of it was amusingly given by Mère St. Joseph in writing to one of the secondary

houses. "Just after dinner," she writes, "the portress came to say that the King was going to visit us. Everybody set to work to clean the courtyards, because we had just been getting coal in. The boarders put on their best frocks and were gathered in the recreation hall. We were only just ready when His Majesty arrived, accompanied by twelve or fifteen of his suite. We conducted him first to our Community room, where there were about a dozen Sisters, professed and novices. We had not assembled the entire Community, because it was not the Sisters he was coming to see but the schools."

When he saw the Sisters looking so happy the King asked if they were always good, if in cases of insubordination they were put in the dungeon, etc. Mère St. Joseph told him that such cases never arose, and that, moreover, a rule provided that any Sister who disturbed order might be sent away. "Must be, Madame, must be," said the King in a stern voice.

"When we went to the boarding school," continues Mère St. Joseph, "he asked Sister Superior where we came from. I was careful to answer, 'I am French, naturalised by Your Majesty.' He is not too awe-inspiring; once the first few words are said one is quite at home with him.

"The boarders sang a pretty little song of welcome and three of them made a complimentary address. The King was much struck by their appearance, for it was not the kind of regiment he was used to inspecting. He asked how many there were, why they were all dressed alike, up to what age we kept them at school, whether they came from town or the country. He was told they were from different provinces and from Holland. He then asked if they learned Dutch.

We told him we could teach it but that for the most part the children came to perfect their French. 'I understand,' he said. Finally he expressed his thanks to the children for their reception and seemed pleased. He was very gracious to us, which could not be said of some of his gentlemen-in-waiting. They looked bored, although the ceremony was not long. It must be remembered they had not yet dined.

"From the boarding school the King passed to the Free Schools. Everywhere he was greeted with cries of 'Long live the King!' He looked at everything with interest and said a few words to the mistresses. He spoke at some length to Sister Madeleine—you know she is not shy with a king any more than with anyone else."

The feelings of the boarders when they heard of the promised visit were, we are assured by one who was of their number, anything but enthusiastic. Their resentment of the King's treatment of the Sisters was proportionate to the esteem in which they held them, and it was rather the hope of disposing the monarch in the favour of their mistresses than any enthusiasm for his person which evoked their acclamations. On his part the King was genuinely impressed by the personality of Mère St. Joseph, and when taking his leave expressed his admiration by saying to her, "Madame, a woman like you ought to live for ever."

The royal visit certainly did much to dissipate the King's prejudice, which arose probably from misconception of the life and work of the Sisters. A mutual understanding was effected by it which led to more amicable feelings on both sides. Mère St. Joseph writes to the Community at Jumet: "Since we have seen the King we have all felt drawn to pray for him. Is it perhaps his kindliness, or his simple,

straightforward manner? I do not know, but the boarders have quite spontaneously evinced the same disposition. That is why we intend to make our Novena to the Sacred Heart chiefly for him and his family."

Though the King personally seemed to have conceived a favourable idea of the Sisters, his Minister of the Interior still continued to raise difficulties for them.

The concessions he had been obliged to make to Mlle. de Biolley, in regard to Verviers, still rankled, and he tried to neutralise their good effect by counting the three Sisters who had been sent to Verviers as forming part of the Namur Community, and accused the Sisters of exceeding the number allowed. Fortunately they were able to prove that they were in the right, but the atmosphere of suspicion and fault-finding was tiresome and irritating.

In October 1829 the King accepted, after much hesitation, the Bishops of Tournai, Ghent and Liège, and at the same time granted full liberty to all the seminaries. The hearts of all the Belgian Catholics were filled with joy and they considered this to be the dawn of a brighter day. Their hopes were considerably shaken, however, by the royal proclamation of the following December, announcing that King William intended to retain his monopoly of education. The perfect self-possession, the clearness of view and the decision of Mère St. Joseph throughout all these vicissitudes were almost incomprehensible and give their own testimony to the firmness of her confidence in God. While she was guiding her Sisters in averting danger and devising defensive measures against each new method of attack, she was at the same time working at the development and strengthening of the

Institute as though she could count upon the future. The house of Nouveau Bois was purchased; Jumet and St. Hubert were considerably enlarged; improvements were carried out at Dinant and Gembloux, while the annals of the Mother house are a record of continuous progress.

Successive additions to the boarding school were necessary to provide for the augmented number of pupils, and in 1828 the chapel was enlarged, and reopened on the feast of its patron, St. Joseph, in the following year.

In 1830 it was the turn of the Day School. Though the political sky was overcast, and human prudence would have counselled delay, Mère St. Joseph, seeing the Sisters obliged to refuse children every day, decided to undertake at once the enlargement of the original building. The summer of 1830 saw the building operations begun.

A few months earlier three of the French Sisters expelled from their own Communities on account of their nationality had been sent to take charge of the Hospice at Huy, this being the fifth charitable institution undertaken by the Sisters who had been dismissed from their schools. "We are like mice," wrote Mère St. Joseph gaily, "when one hole is stopped up they run to another."

But the long struggle was drawing to a close. By the end of July 1830 Paris was in a state of revolution, and by August the fever had spread to Belgium. Out of that crisis the Belgians emerged with a definite constitution and a King of their own choice.

In greeting the new dawn Mère St. Joseph gave thanks to God for His protection of the Institute. Often it had seemed on the brink of ruin, yet it had weathered the storm and not one house had been lost.

“That Mère St. Joseph should have succeeded in preserving her Institute in spite of the measures taken for its destruction,” says one witness, “is to me quite as evident a miracle as the raising of the dead to life. God blessed visibly the confidence of His humble and magnanimous servant.”

CHAPTER XVII

CALM AFTER STORM

THE recognition of Belgian independence inaugurated a new era in the life of Mère St. Joseph. She was in her seventy-fifth year and celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of her profession and of the foundation of the Institute on October 15, 1831. In spite of her advanced age she looked forward with great hope to the progress which the Church would make now that the fetters she had borne so long were shaken off and she was free to prosper and to go forward.

The schools attached to the different Belgian houses were not all on the same footing. At Thuin and Dinant the schools had been founded at the request of the Municipality, which provided the building and a certain grant for the free education given to the poor. In other districts the foundation of the schools had been due to the joint initiation of the Foundresses and the clergy; the usual arrangement being that the Sisters took over the entire administration and were responsible for the finances. This had not prevented the Government from imposing its regulations upon them and exercising over them a severe system of inspection.

In every house there had existed from the beginning a free school for the poor, together with day and boarding schools for the middle and upper classes.

Under unique conditions, due to the peculiar

circumstances of the time, was the single foundation of Verviers. Known officially as the "De Biolley school," it was staffed by Sisters of Notre Dame but financed by Mlle. Clary, in whose house and under whose patronage it was established. The arrangement, of course, was recognised on both sides as a temporary expedient, and now that the circumstances which occasioned the derogation from established custom no longer existed, it became impossible for the abnormal arrangement to continue. Mlle. Clary, therefore, regretfully separated herself from the Sisters, and without abandoning her title or her duties of benefactress, made over to them the large house which was already the centre of a prosperous work. Verviers thus became the twelfth convent of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

One of the first benefits of the new state of things was the return to Belgium of the Brothers of the Christian schools. Mère St. Joseph rejoiced over this as she had grieved for their departure, regarding it as one of the happiest auguries for the future of the Church in Belgium.

Towards the close of the year the Pope, Pius VIII, died suddenly at Rome, and after an unusually long conclave Gregory XVI was elected in the following February.

While the Church was electing a new Pope, Belgium was taking measures to choose a King, and Mère St. Joseph urged the Sisters to pray earnestly that the choice of her statesmen might be blessed. After negotiations lasting over a period of some months, Leopold I became King of the Belgians. At that time the ever-growing establishment of the Sisters of Notre Dame was one of the most important institutions in Namur, and on the occasion of the King's royal progress, a visit to the convent was included

as part of the official programme. The project fell through on account of the disastrous "Campaign of Ten Days," during which the Dutch sent their hostile forces as far as Louvain. The attack was repulsed, however, by French intervention, and by September the country was settled and the Sisters were able to travel to Namur as usual for their retreat.

The assembly was, as may be imagined, a memorable and a joyous one. The feeling of liberation was in the air, no representative of a hostile Government was present at the ceremony of profession, and a great many postulants, counting among their number no less than fourteen ex-boarders of Namur itself, received the habit. The total number of novices was brought up to forty, and it became possible to think of further foundations.

In a letter to her relatives in the beginning of 1832, Mère St. Joseph gives an account of the growth of the Institute and the nature of its work. The twenty or so Sisters who had accompanied the Foundresses to Belgium had multiplied more than tenfold. "It is a little vine," she says, "which the saintly Mère Julie has planted, which I have watered as well as I could, and to which God has given such an increase that now its branches extend throughout almost the whole of Belgium, which is, of course, only a tiny place," she laughingly admits.

The influence of King Leopold made itself felt in a sort of renaissance in science and art which necessitated a broadening of the curriculum in all the schools. It became necessary to consider the wisdom of introducing into the convent boarding schools such subjects as music, drawing and painting. The decision was more important than it would seem, for in those days the step was a distinct innovation, and involved the suppression of a rule of Mère Julie restricting the

course of studies to the more serious branches of learning. After much prayer and consultation, Mère St. Joseph decided to take the step, and definitely admitted the extension of the curriculum.

She incurred thereby the criticism of some of the ultra-conservative Sisters, who saw in this the opening of the door to worldliness. Mère St. Joseph laid their anxiety to rest, assuring them that she understood their natural solicitude and that she had had the same fears as they. She was acting only after much consideration and discussion with those whose judgment was to be trusted. She reminded them further that as the decision was hers, they personally would incur no responsibility for its consequences, and that the matter being one which did not touch the principles of religious life, but only the exterior work of the Sisters, she, as Superior General, was acting within her power in making the change.

It may seem surprising to modern readers that so much stir could have been made over what seems a very trifling matter. To understand it we have to go back nearly a century, and forgetting the attitude of the present day, when little in heaven or earth is regarded as alien to the programme even of the Infant School, to try to view this from the angle of those who were just emerging from the educational chaos caused by the Revolution. With the wisdom born of experience Mère St. Joseph drew up a document to meet these criticisms and had it read in every Community.

In March 1833 the earliest friend of the Institute, Father Thomas, was called to his reward. After his death, Father Varin, his colleague, found upon his writing-table a letter from Mère St. Joseph acknowledging his good wishes for the Feast of St. Frances on the 8th. Writing at that same table, Father

Varin penned a letter to Mère St. Joseph, in the course of which he said these consoling words: "Your whole family is singularly dear to me, and it is with great consolation that I learn from time to time that it is blessed by God and is working usefully for His glory."

She had received equally unequivocal testimony from another quarter. In the previous July the visit of King Leopold, which had fallen through in 1830, actually took place. The King was accompanied by a large and distinguished retinue, including two of his nephews, one of whom was the future Prince Consort of Queen Victoria.

The reception differed but little in outward ceremonial from that accorded to King William some years previously, but it was more spontaneous and whole-hearted.

Seven or eight hundred children were drawn up in the courtyard, which was decorated with the Belgian colours, and over a hundred boarders sang their greeting in the Recreation Hall.

The occasion made so favourable an impression on the King, that the following year he repeated his visit in company with his Queen, Louise Marie. The French princess felt at home in a convent where the Superior was by birth a Frenchwoman, and in consequence whenever she founded a school she chose the Sisters of Notre Dame for its mistresses. Almost immediately afterwards the Queen sought to secure Sisters for a school she was establishing in the capital, promising to furnish the necessary funds herself. The royal request could not be granted at that time, and the Queen allowed it to be postponed. Her wishes were subsequently fulfilled, and to-day the Institute possesses not one but five houses in Brussels and its suburbs.

The same year saw the consecration of Mgr. Barrett as Bishop, and at the retreat thirty Sisters were admitted to profession and twelve postulants took the habit.

Another sacrifice was demanded of the Institute, in the death of its official protector, Canon de Cuvelier, in November.

This holy priest made no secret of his esteem for the Co-foundress, and his loss was the more sensibly felt in that his successor was a man of narrower views.

In spite of all difficulties, however, the Institute was everywhere making marked progress; Namur alone counted a hundred Sisters, and it became necessary to add to the boarding school. At Ghent the number of boarders exceeded the hundred, and at Verviers the Sisters took charge of a large orphanage founded by the Biolleys.

Belgium was certainly enjoying compensation for the long and hard years of her oppression. In 1834 Mère St. Joseph hailed with enthusiasm the foundation of the Catholic University of Louvain. Her gratification took a practical form, and in response to the appeal of the Bishops for funds, she called upon all her convents to make an immediate contribution and to promise an annual subscription for a certain number of years in proportion to the resources of each.

The realisation of the great good to religion and to education which would follow upon the foundation of a Catholic University was the last great joy of this great soul, and was succeeded by the crushing sorrow which was to overshadow the closing years of her life.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAST TRIAL, 1835

THE life of Mère St. Joseph was drawing towards its close. She had laboured long and lovingly in the Master's vineyard, and now that she began to see the rich clusters hanging on the vines, it would seem that she might have chanted her *Nunc Dimittis*.

But God was reserving for her a final cross, the heavier to bear because it was laid upon her shoulders by those who owed her most, and because it endangered once more the spirit and consequently the very existence of the Institute to which her life had been consecrated.

The health of the Assistant Superior, Sister Marie Thérèse, became seriously affected, and Mère St. Joseph, instead of receiving help from her, had to shoulder alone the burden of the Generalate, and to add to the already heavy work which this entailed the government of the Mother house.

In 1833 it seemed clear that the indisposition of Sister Marie Thérèse would incapacitate her for an uncertain length of time from discharging the duties of Assistant Superior, and Mère St. Joseph appointed a sub-assistant. The Sister chosen for this office was Sister Borgia. At the time of her nomination she was only thirty years old, but had given proof of efficiency and had been elected Counsellor by the Community. She had passed from the boarding school of Namur

into the novitiate, and had spent all her religious life at the Mother house. Trained when a pupil by Sister Gertrude Morel, the first mistress of the boarding school, a highly gifted teacher, it was natural that when she was appointed a member of the staff she should play an important part in the conduct of the school. Whenever Sister Gertrude was unable to be at her post, and in the latter years of her life this happened fairly often, Sister Borgia became her deputy.

In the light of subsequent developments it seems fair to suggest that her devotedness was not completely disinterested. Sister Borgia was ambitious, and loved to play or even to understudy a prominent part. On the death of Sister Gertrude, the direction of the boarding school was placed entirely in her hands. In the position of head mistress she made herself popular not only with the pupils, but also with their parents, and her reputation began to spread outside the convent walls. Even within the Community she held sway over many of the Sisters, who were fascinated by her brilliant gifts, and whose admiration constituted for her a subtle and dangerous form of flattery.

Among the boarders there was one who was assiduous in her attentions to Sister Borgia, and who had confided to her the secret of her religious vocation. In 1830 this girl entered the novitiate at Namur, receiving the name of Sister Francis Xavier, and immediately after her profession was sent to Thuin. She appears to have been ill-balanced, with very morbid and hysterical tendencies. For such a nature Thuin was a dangerous environment.

The convent there, it will be remembered, had been a monastery, and its cloisters and all its associations

breathed of the past. What would have been to a normal mind merely an addition of romantic charm to the place, affected more seriously the over-impressionable imagination of Sister Francis Xavier. She began to live in an unreal world peopled by mysterious beings, and in the end became a victim of her own delusions to such an extent that she induced the abnormal phenomena of a pseudo-mysticism, claimed to have experienced ecstasies, to have seen visions and to have received supernatural communications of various kinds.

At Thuin she was not taken seriously, but her extravagant behaviour was a disturbance to the peace of the Community, and the Superior judged it wise to solicit her removal.

Sister Francis Xavier was recalled to the Mother house and attached to the teaching staff of the boarding school under her former mistress. Sister Borgia resented the suspicion with which the young Sister was regarded, all the more that it seemed to cast a reflection on her own judgment. Imprudently she began to take up the cause of Sister Francis Xavier, who responded by pouring out her confidences into the sympathetic ear of the older Sister. The result was to turn a discreet interest into a vehement and unconcealed admiration, and to make Sister Borgia believe that the younger nun was misunderstood and undervalued.

In her position as sub-assistant, moreover, she did all she could to rehabilitate the young Sister with her chief superiors; in the Community the general opinion veered completely round and Sister Francis Xavier began to be regarded with compassion and interest as a victim.

She was not slow to observe the change of attitude



Canon de Cuvelier.

in those around her, though outwardly she gave no sign. Seeing that she was an object of interest, almost of veneration, on account of her strange seizures, she began to give way to these more and more. The symptoms of a mysterious illness began to manifest themselves; sometimes she became temporarily blind or deaf, or unable to speak; then, when the use of her sense organs was restored, she would be seized with a local or even a complete paralysis. Yet throughout all this she gave great edification by her uncomplaining, even gay manner. Subjected by the doctors to painful treatment, she bore all in silence without even an involuntary exclamation. In their opinion each recovery was almost a miracle.

Learned and virtuous priests put faith in the supernatural character of these manifestations, expressed perhaps too openly their admiration of her virtue, and gave full credence to the Divine communications she claimed to have received.

Mère St. Joseph tried to respect their judgment, but intuitively felt distrustful, and while treating the Sister with kindness, reserved her own judgment and awaited developments. One definite step she took, and that was to warn the Sisters to exercise discretion in their relations with the patient, and prudently to forbid Sister Borgia to interfere in any way with her spiritual direction. The Sisters in general obeyed, but Sister Borgia was keenly interested, and enjoyed being the recipient of these mysterious confidences. She could not overcome her curiosity and her vanity sufficiently to submit to the injunction of her Superior, and her disobedience led to her undoing.

The "revelations" of Sister Francis Xavier began to concern her confidential friend in a way that was distinctly flattering. The state of the Institute called

for reform on several points and Sister Borgia was destined to carry this out. The idea aroused no repugnance in the mind of the person to whom it was communicated. Sister Borgia began to consider the project seriously, and to select from those around her the Sisters she considered most capable of co-operating with her.

Gradually, one after the other was inoculated with her views until there was a veritable cabal of eighteen, which number included the Mistress of Novices, and a group of mistresses distinguished by their intellectual gifts and united in their admiration of Sister Borgia.

Three points, it will be remembered, were regarded by the Foundresses as fundamental in the character of the Institute—the union of all houses under the government of a Superior General, the absence of any distinction in Community between Sisters engaged in teaching and those designed for manual work, and lastly devotion to the instruction of the poor.

The establishment of the first point had cost the Institute its expulsion from France, it now became Mère St. Joseph's part to uphold at the price of much suffering the other two. She emerged from the struggle triumphant, with the rule and the spirit of her Institute vindicated, but worn and aged by the conflict.

The first step necessary to the success of the plan was to overcome Mère St. Joseph. The "reformers" did not anticipate much difficulty in this, for the Superior General was growing gradually weaker—perhaps they considered that even if she proved recalcitrant they would not have long to wait.

They intended to relegate the Sisters who were occupied in domestic work to the position of lay Sisters, and if they were unwilling to fall in with the

new constitution, to allow them the option of withdrawing from the Institute.

Moreover the would-be rulers reserved the right of dismissing any members who from their point of view were unsatisfactory.

The teaching Sisters, together with the local Superiors, would form an intellectual and privileged class, and would represent the Institute in all relations with the civil and religious authorities.

And in the second place, whereas the Institute had been primarily founded to devote itself to the teaching of the poor in the most abandoned places, and the teaching of the children of the leisured class had been regarded as subsidiary, in the reformed body the order was to be exactly reversed. Boarding schools for the children of the upper classes were to be the main object of the zeal of the Institute, though it should be required to maintain some places in which to teach a few poor children. Day schools destined for the middle class were to be entirely suppressed.

It seems incomprehensible that the leaders of the new movement should have been so blind as to have pursued their plans without any reflection that they were straying from the safe path of obedience; no doubt their judgments were clouded by the revelations which purported to come direct from the Holy Ghost to Sister Francis Xavier. A religious too who was completely deceived by the apparent sanctity of the visionary secretly put himself and his learning at their service. All the oracles of the "prophetess," as Sister Francis Xavier was called by the initiated, were submitted to his judgment before being divulged, and "the Father has approved" became a sort of password to reassure the timid. And in consequence little discussions were held among the conspirators, scruples of conscience

were laid to rest, and Sisters whose relations with their superiors had hitherto been frank and open, became secretive and unstraightforward. The leaders of the cabal did not hesitate to use their influential positions as counsellors to remove from their path any who seemed likely to oppose the progress of the "reform."

In May 1834 five country-bred children who were regarded as being too simple for the ultra-refined tone of the school were got rid of on one pretext or other. In July a young professed Sister who did not prove amenable was transferred to Ghent. As it was impossible to propose this removal without some grounds for the suggestion, she was accused of disturbing the consciences of her companions by indiscreetly communicating her temptations and desolation of soul.

As she was of a somewhat scrupulous disposition, the charge was believed, and the Sister, when rebuked, did not justify herself, but accepted the unfounded accusations in silence.

In September several novices loyal to the traditional spirit, but refractory towards the apostles of the "reform," were represented by the Novice Mistress as insubordinate, and dismissed from the Institute. All this happened at a time when the illness of the Assistant Superior was at an acute stage, and when Mère St. Joseph's increasing weakness obliged her to lean more and more upon her counsellors.

The crisis, however, was still to come. The year 1835 completed Mère St. Joseph's second term of office, and according to the visionary it was destined to witness the inauguration of the Generalate of Sister Borgia.

Emboldened by success the conspirators determined

on more sweeping measures. The Externat or Middle School was closed. Sister Francis Xavier had received a "revelation" that the morality of some of the pupils was endangered by the conversations of others. Such was the report carried to Mère St. Joseph, who, being a person of sound judgment, was convinced that the charge was a gross exaggeration and refused at first to give it credence. It was her duty, of course, to investigate the matter, and this she did without discovering anything gravely amiss. But Sister Borgia insisted, and herself conducted a second inquiry, with, according to her, alarming results.

Mère St. Joseph submitted the matter to the judgment of the Bishop, Mgr. Barrett, and only then agreed to the drastic measure for which her subordinates were pressing. Out of consideration for the families of the pupils the pretext was given that the classes were to be completely reorganised.

It may be imagined what a stir this step caused in the town. Most people thought the kindest interpretation that could be put upon it was that the Mother General was suffering from softening of the brain, and this report spread the more rapidly because it was diligently fostered by the very people who had instigated the measure for their own ends.

It is a bitter thing when one's enemies are those of one's own household.

Before the end of April it was rumoured that a similar state of things existed in the boarding school. The supposed delinquents were expelled one by one at short intervals with many precautions, and in less than six weeks the number of the boarders was diminished by one-third.

It was useless, of course, to think this could be done and kept secret. The recriminations of the

children unjustly accused, and the protests of their parents, soon made the affair public. The Bishop was blamed: it was said that the Superiors had acted on his advice. But the Bishop was seriously ill, and away from Namur. In his absence his substitutes, M. Poncelet and M. Collard, took up the matter. They came to see Mère St. Joseph, and one interview sufficed to convince them that the story that she was in a state of second childhood was a pure fabrication.

Having a shrewd suspicion, moreover, that the Superior General's confidence in some of her subordinates was not justified, they stipulated that the investigation should be carried out by Mère St. Joseph in person.

This decision put an end to the depopulation of the boarding school. Mère St. Joseph refused to agree to any further expulsions before the holidays. In this matter she acted contrary to the advice of her counsellors, who still urged extreme measures, and who did not fail to make their disapproval felt.

The difference of opinion, becoming known in the Community, produced a division. The older Sisters, humble, obedient and truly loyal, ranged themselves on the side of Mère St. Joseph and defended her loudly from the unjust attack. The partisans of Sister Borgia were for the most part young Sisters of a certain intellectual culture, assertive and self-confident, but lacking the religious training and experience of those older and wiser than themselves.

The grief caused to the sensitive heart of Mère St. Joseph by this disunion may be imagined, yet she took no hasty step, lest she should drive her erring children into open rebellion. "Even if one of them is guilty, I should not like her to feel that she had lost her

mother," she replied to one of the Sisters who urged her to take strong action. Another Sister received a gentle rebuke for endeavouring to enlist the help of a secondary Superior on a visit to Namur. "You mean well," said Mère St. Joseph, "but the means you take to help me in my trouble are not good. Nothing which wounds charity can be any consolation to me. Pray and do not talk about it."

A Sister who had been a boarder at Namur, and who after her profession had been sent to St. Hubert, paints a vivid picture of the change in the atmosphere of the Mother house when she returned to it for the holidays.

The outer aspect of things was unaltered, but there was a chill in the air. Sister Borgia and her admirers seemed to form a state within the state, and the sub-assistant, by cleverly eliminating her opponents and deluding her Superiors, had made herself practically mistress of the house. Yet her schemes were laid so skilfully that even then Mère St. Joseph trusted her completely and was actually proposing to nominate her Assistant.

On her return to St. Hubert, the Sister to whose pen we owe these impressions communicated her misgivings to her Superior, and though she was merely told that it was not fitting for a young Sister to play the critic, no doubt her report threw some light upon the position of the Mother house, the more so as it was confirmed by other Sisters returning to their Superiors. Some of these judged it to be their duty to write to the Superior General on the subject, but many of their letters were intercepted by Sister Borgia and arrangements made for their visits were cancelled on one pretext or another.

On the 13th June Mère St. Joseph had invited all

the houses of the Institute to make a Novena to the Sacred Heart. This had been undertaken with extraordinary fervour and it did not fail of its effect.

On the morning of the 24th the Superior of Jumet, Sister Ignace (Goethals), arrived at Namur. A long conference took place between the Superiors of the Mother house and the visitor, the result of which was the nomination of Sister Ignace as Assistant.

The news, heralded with joy by the greater number of the Sisters, came as a thunderbolt upon Sister Borgia. Her vaulting ambition had overleaped itself, and her pride could not brook being supplanted. She broke out into open revolt, and Mère St. Joseph, whose long suffering was well measured by this incident, tried in vain to save her from herself. Though she protested that she would always preserve her esteem for the Co-foundress, she left the Institute. Eighteen Sisters had, she declared, freely resolved to follow her, but as a matter of fact two only were found to be thus falsely true, and these were two sisters by birth, Sister Francis Xavier and Sister Marie Xavier.

The departure of Sister Borgia tore away the veil from the eyes of those over whom she had established her sway. They acknowledged their guilt and in all humility sought for pardon from the Mother they had so deeply wronged.

And, because she was a Mother, strong and tenderly compassionate, she pardoned them; yet because she was also appointed to uphold the rule they had broken, she exacted from them due reparation.

On the very day when Sister Borgia severed herself from the Institute, Mère St. Joseph assembled all the Sisters of the Mother house. Her heart was broken, yet it was not to relieve her pain by seeking their sympathy, it was to point out to all how the least

breach of the vow of obedience may lead to the loss of a vocation, and to commend the repentant Sisters, when they should be re-admitted to the Community, to the charity of all.

At the Chapter a few days later she made her last public reference to the sad events of the preceding months. "Your Sisters are about to come back to the Community life," she said. "Receive them with love and kindness. They have suffered; they have so generously repaired their fault, that they are worthy of the love of the Heart of Jesus, and of yours. Try to excel in that delicate and gentle kindness which assuages all suffering and which loves the more because it has greatly endured. You say that you wish to console me: if you are sincere in that, love one another as your old Mother has loved you all. Forget everything, and from henceforth let us form but one body and one soul."

Mère St. Joseph's next duty was to repair the wrong done to the families whose children had been unjustly accused. She wished this act of strict justice to be speedily accomplished, and in order that the rehabilitation of these pupils might be as public as had been the wrong done to them, a special message was sent to each from the Superiors inviting them to return. There were but few who did not respond to the invitation. "For my part," writes one of them, who received her letter on the morning of July 2, "I was back at school before dinner-time. Dear Mère St. Joseph, to whom each of us was conducted, received me with tenderness. Tears were in her eyes, but they did not prevent her from recognising her child, and when I met her motherly glance, I forgot all I had gone through. I do not know how it was, but what had happened was soon forgotten,

and a new life seemed to animate the school. . . . As I grew older I understood better the extraordinary veneration with which we, our families and the town of Namur regarded Mère St. Joseph. If it had not been for this universal esteem and the reputation of sanctity which she bore, her Institute could never have recovered from this terrible trial."

In noting the work of restoration which followed the crisis of 1835 a tribute must be paid to the excellent influence of the new Assistant, Sister Ignace, whose appointment had as it were pricked the bubble of the plot. Under her rule every branch of the establishment flourished as of old, while she was perfectly at one with Mère St. Joseph and Sister Marie Thérèse: the motto of the three being, as the last-named happily put it, "One in spirit, one in aim, one in will."

The health of Sister Marie Thérèse was better than it had been for years, and her natural gaiety returned.

In 1836 the Superiors were assembled at Namur for a new election. This time again the votes were unanimously recorded in favour of the Mother who had been so severely tried and was so completely trusted.

And at this general Chapter Mgr. Dehesselle, who presided, proposed the introduction of an important modification into the constitution of the Institute, namely, that the Generalate should henceforth be held for life. The Sisters realised that this step would strengthen the hands of the Mother General, and add to the dignity and responsibility of her office. Unanimously, therefore, they adopted the proposal. Their decision bound the entire Institute, present and future, it was approved by Mgr. Dehesselle, and in

1844 the sanction of Pope Gregory XVI made it irrevocable.

And so the Institute came out of its trial strengthened and more united than ever, and Mère St. Joseph, who with Mère Julie had made so gallant a stand for the preservation of one fundamental principle of the Congregation, emerged from the furnace of tribulation as the preserver of the other two.

CHAPTER XIX

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

“ I WILL go there because I want to.” Over three-quarters of a century have passed since the words introduced us to the future Mère St. Joseph, and it will not be unprofitable to pause and study the development of the wilful, spirited little French child into the Co-foundress and Mother General of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

In the story of that development there is nothing to astonish the student of Christian psychology. Both in the spiritual and in the material sphere, Frances Blin de Bourdon was born heiress to a noble estate. While generations of a cultured ancestry gave to her bearing an innate dignity and graciousness, centuries of Christian chivalry had bequeathed to her a rich legacy of lofty ideals of truth, of loyalty, of charity and of self-command. Given her native endowments, her environment, and training, there was only one, but that the ever incalculable, factor of human free-will to complicate the problem. Upon the correspondence of such a soul to grace depends the momentous issue of high sanctity or egregious failure ; it will tread no middle way.

The possession of wealth, of personal charm, of intellectual gifts might have led to spiritual catastrophe in the case of Frances, as in that of so many others. But they were combined with the gift of the spiritual philosopher's stone, capable of turning the dross of

circumstances into gold, and of bringing the next world into line with this. From her very babyhood, as we have seen, she was trained to form her judgments by the standards of Faith. And in consequence the wealth which might have been a snare became material for charity and detachment; the brilliant social gifts which might have led to pride and worldliness produced the lovable and unselfish Mother Superior, and the intellectual equipment of Frances Blin de Bourdon was consecrated to the noblest of all causes, the training of Christian educators.

The more we study her life story, the more it is borne in upon us that sanctity consists not in the suppression of natural characteristics, but in their development according to the Will of God. The reminiscences of her contemporaries, a few of which we shall gather together in the present chapter, paint for us a delightful portrait of Mère St. Joseph, in which we readily discern the lineaments of Mlle. de Gézaincourt. Before, however, we turn to study that portrait in some detail, one or two other general considerations seem to call for remark.

The vocation of Mère St. Joseph was not determined by natural attraction or on principles of human economy. Her early attraction, as we have seen, was for Carmel, and the remarkable gift of prayer to which her confessor, Father Thomas, bears witness would seem at first sight to confirm her choice. Her devoted service to the sick, in the persons of her grandmother, mother and father in turn, and later her tenderness towards the stricken Julie, would have been regarded by most human judges as indications that she should consecrate her life to the sick and suffering in some nursing order. And yet in the designs of God she was destined neither for the one nor the other, but to be one of the corner-stones of a congregation devoted

to the teaching of the young, for whose society she had naturally no attraction and in whose presence she confessed she did not feel at home.

Is this perhaps an instance of the way in which "God's greatness flows around our incompleteness," and brings about our fullest self-realisation? For it is true that we shall probably develop our natural aptitudes in any environment, but for the development of more latent capacities we need the goad of necessity.

Those early gifts of Frances were not lost or buried in a napkin; the would-be Carmelite, as a Sister of Notre Dame, frequently passed six or eight hours of the day in prayer; she realised too, as none but a true contemplative could have done, the necessity of the development of the interior life for any valuable work in education; the embryo Sister of Charity found as Superior abundant scope for her ministrations in the care of her religious children: thus the docility to the inspirations of grace which dictated each step in the life of Mère St. Joseph ultimately led to a richer fulfilment of her potentialities than any choice of a career more closely in accordance with natural inclination. We now turn to study some personal characteristics of Mère St. Joseph at the close of her life, when the work of the Divine Artist was well-nigh completed.

Those whose relations brought them only into momentary contact with her were always struck by the distinction of her manner, to which religious discipline had added the charm of an unruffled serenity and an affability which was not merely an exterior quality, but was based on genuine and large-hearted charity.

On one occasion she was obliged to call upon the Prefect of Namur, in order to defend the interests of the Institute. The Prefect, unaccustomed to dealing

with religious, showed himself less than perfectly courteous, and transacted the business in a brusque and offhand way. As the interview proceeded, however, he was impressed by the bearing of Mère St. Joseph, his manner became more gracious, and he acceded to her request. When she left, he turned to the staff of officials, "Did you notice her?" he asked. "What dignity beneath that humble costume!" Her natural kindness of heart was such that even in the case of dumb creatures she could not look upon suffering without endeavouring to relieve it. She was walking one day in the garden at Namur when her attention was attracted by the alarmed twitterings of a bird, whose nest of fledglings was being carried off by a gardener. Perceiving what had happened, she rebuked the gardener severely and insisted on his replacing the nest on the branch from which he had taken it. The agitated mother flew back to take possession of her little ones, and the gardener, we may suppose, made up his mind not to go bird's-nesting again, at any rate under the eyes of the Superior General. The instance is trivial, but characteristic. And if such was her compassion for the animal creation it may be imagined to what lengths she would go in her endeavour to help the poor and unfortunate among her fellow-creatures. Without a love for the poor and abandoned no Sister of Notre Dame can be said to have imbibed the true spirit of her Institute, and the story of Mère St. Joseph's long struggles on behalf of the education of the poor proves how valiant a defender the interests of the little ones of Christ had found in the Co-foundress; as Superior, and later as Superior General, she was assiduous in her visits to the poor schools, and delighted to preside at the ceremony of the clothing of poor children, which is one of the traditional celebrations of Christmastide in the Institute.

How many times, too, did she unobtrusively send help to families in passing need, or receive into the boarding school the children of those who were suffering from reverses of fortune, and thus secure for them an education suitable to their rank in life.

Misery and misfortune were an unfailing claim upon her solicitude. "I shall never forget," writes one of the Sisters, "her compassion for a poor mason who had contracted the sad habit of drink. His employer threatened to dismiss him, but our dear Mère St. Joseph pleaded for him. She then found employment for him in the house; she visited him now and again at his work, and by her kindness and encouraging advice effected his complete reformation. He became a competent and trustworthy workman and brought up his large family in the fear of God. At the present day," concludes the writer, "his children are in prosperous circumstances and are never tired of repeating what they had often heard their father say, that if it had not been for the patient and encouraging charity of Mère St. Joseph, he would have been ruined body and soul."

A charming little story is told of a painter's apprentice who was sent to the convent to renovate some old woodwork. So inefficiently did he set about it that the Sister appointed to superintend the work betook herself to the Superior to make her complaint. "My child," gently replied Mère St. Joseph, "this poor lad must learn to earn his living, it is a charity to let him practise on our woodwork. God bears so patiently with our sorry attempts at the task of our perfection, and gives us time and means to improve ourselves. He is even willing to forgive and forget the shortcomings of our work in His cause. Do not imitate the harshness of the unmerciful servant, but imitate the goodness of God."

The point of view was novel, and the anecdote throws light on the keen sense of proportion of Mère St. Joseph; while no doubt it suggested to the Sister a new scale of relative values.

It will be readily believed from what we have seen of Frances at Gézaincourt, at Bourdon and at Amiens, that when she was nominated Superior the invalid Sisters were the objects of her tenderest solicitude. The rooms chosen for infirmaries were always large, well aired, cheerful in aspect and furnished almost lavishly. Not only did she procure for the bodies of the sufferers everything which might give them relief, she also understood and sympathised with the mental distress which their illness caused them.

A young Sister at Namur fell into a slow decline. Naturally high-spirited, she fought a losing fight for years with the fell malady, but the day came when she was obliged to take to her bed. Knowing her temperament and realising how keenly she felt her isolation from the Community, Mère St. Joseph had her installed in a room adjoining the chapel, and there she used to visit her three or four times a day, chatting with her in a soothing, unhurried manner as though she had no other claim on her time. She did more; she had an opening made in the dividing wall so that the patient could follow from her bed the services in the chapel. This ingenious act of charity gave the sufferer courage to resign herself, and enabled her to spend the last months of her life in loving and almost uninterrupted communion with God.

Another Sister had occasion to be grateful for a similar act of motherly care. When Sister Madeleine was taking the children of the poor school to the church one frosty day, she fell and broke her leg. The accident confined her to the infirmary for long and weary weeks. It seemed, moreover, as though she

would be cut off from the chapel for all that time on account of an awkward spiral staircase which rendered transportation impossible. But the energy and ingenuity of Mère St. Joseph were equal to the occasion, and a sort of bridge was constructed over the courtyard joining the infirmary wing to the main portion of the building, by which the invalid could be conveniently wheeled to the chapel. She exercised the same consideration in the case of Sister Ignace, who had a severe attack of rheumatism during one of her visits to Namur. Complications ensued, and the crises of pain were so severe as to keep her almost constantly awake. When she did succeed in getting a few hours' respite, Mère St. Joseph was attentive to remove any possibility of disturbance. She would even prevent the ringing of the Community bell while the patient slept, and send novices instead to each quarter of the house to announce the hours of the Community exercises. She did not show an equal degree of tenderness towards herself, however. When she was already seventy-eight years old and suffering from one of her usual severe attacks of rheumatism, the Sisters ventured to substitute a none too luxurious armchair for the uncomfortable straight-backed chair which she used when presiding at the Community gatherings. The tone in which Mère St. Joseph ordered it to be removed and forbade them ever to attempt "such an abuse" again admitted of no remonstrance and the unfortunate armchair disappeared for good.

She had indeed something of that passion for detachment which characterised the Saint of Assisi. In all personal matters she interpreted strictly the obligation of her vow of poverty, nor did she allow her position as Superior to become a pretext for derogating from her high standard; her clothing was

coarse, her room furnished only with the barest necessities, the articles retained for her use being always of mean quality. A novice found her one day mending the binding of her shoes, and asked leave to perform that little service for her. "No, thank you, dear child," answered the Mother General, "we are poor people and the poor wait upon themselves."

The offer was declined so graciously that there was no sting in the refusal, but the novice was deeply impressed and realised that religious poverty was something more than a mere form of words. Another anecdote throws light on Mère St. Joseph's conception of this virtue. She was called away one day from the Community recreation to the parlour. On her return a quarter of an hour later, she told the Sisters that she had promised that each of them would say a prayer for the donor of an alms she had received. It happened that at that time the Sisters were anxious to enlarge the Poor school, but the necessary funds were lacking. One of the Sisters of that department, hoping that Mère St. Joseph had received a princely donation, ventured to ask if the gift would be used for the desired building. Mère St. Joseph laughingly explained that the sum she had received had amounted to one franc fifty. The Sister, who in regard to the matter of evangelical poverty had evidently much to learn, said, "What! do you mean to say that anyone offered you a trivial sum like that and you accepted it?" Then the Mother General's face grew very serious. "Sister," she said, "we have the happiness of calling ourselves the poor of Christ. If I had been offered two farthings I should have accepted them with gratitude. The more the world treats us as genuinely poor, the more it honours us, since it makes us resemble Jesus Christ more nearly."

It is clear from such examples that the voluntary

poverty of Mère St. Joseph did not stop at the obligation imposed by her vow, but went on to that poverty of spirit and humility which are its highest expression. That, from the memorable retreat of 1797, after which she definitely put herself under the guidance of Julie, she never made any disposal of the fortune which remained to her save under obedience, is a trifle compared with the sacrifice she made of her will and judgment. As long as Mère Julie lived she effaced herself so consistently that the Belgian Sisters who entered the novitiate after the transference of the Mother house to Namur scarcely suspected either her former station in life or her position in the Institute. Though, naturally, Mère Julie consulted her on every important matter, we find in her retreat notes the resolution never to give her opinion unless it was definitely called for, and then only with great distrust of her own judgment and great deference for her Superior. Convinced as she was of the supernatural nature of Julie's mission, always and everywhere she was solicitous to make her known and respected. So strong was this conviction that against it the waves of worldly criticism, which strove to destroy a friendship contracted outside her own rank, broke in vain; it was also her support throughout the difficult days at Amiens when her religious superiors sought to detach her from her guide.

With an intense spirit of faith she committed to Julie also her spiritual direction, and as a result she became to her contemporaries and to all succeeding generations an ideal Sister of Notre Dame.

Great souls are less liable than smaller ones to fall into the snares of vainglory on the one hand or of pusillanimity masquerading as humility on the other—faults superficially opposed but actually akin, since both arise from an undue reliance on self.

A Sister who had held office as Superior was one day boasting in Mère St. Joseph's presence of the progress of the Institute. She spoke from personal experience and paid tribute to the wisdom of the Co-foundress which had saved the very existence of the houses threatened by the critical events of 1825 and the following years. The reply of Mère St. Joseph was characteristic. "We are in the hands of a good Father who is helping His child to write," she said. "The child is quite proud that he knows how to write, and his Father allows him to believe that he can do so, though it is He who has guided the little hand, incapable itself of even holding the pen."

Yet her whole life story is proof that, trusting in God, she never shrank from the performance of any duty, however onerous, or from any undertaking, however difficult, which seemed to be for the glory of God. This trust in God, this spirit of heroic enterprise, has been characteristic of all the Saints. We have abundant evidence that Mère St. Joseph practised it not only in moments of sunshine, but in the dark moments of personal trial or when the clouds hung so heavy over the political horizon as to make the continued existence of the Institute problematical. "Let us do what the good God asks for us, day by day, hour by hour," she would say to the Sisters, "without anxiety for the future. We have a good Father; He will provide for all our needs. It is His Will that we should cast all our anxieties upon Him."

She loved too to meet with the same spirit in the Sisters; she wanted to see them full of courage and ready to accept with simplicity either success or failure once they had exerted their best efforts in the great cause to which the Institute had consecrated its existence.

The supernatural logic with which the standards

of Faith were applied to all the circumstances of life is that which lends its distinctive character to the holiness of Mère St. Joseph. It led her to recognise whole-heartedly in her lawful superiors the representatives of God and to pay them the respect due to them under this title. With a self-restraint beyond all praise she resisted the temptation to criticise the action of Mgr. Demandolx in the difficult situation created by M. de Sambucy at Amiens, and even when it became her duty to withstand the policy which would have destroyed the spirit of the Institute, she was never known to speak intemperately or to refuse to credit even the ill-advised cause of all the difficulties with the best of motives, attributing his action to defect of judgment and not to personal ill-will.

During the episcopate of Mgr. Barrett, successor of Mgr. Pisani, the number of Expositions and other spiritual privileges which had been allowed to the churches and chapels of the diocese was considerably restricted. The Community of Namur, accustomed to the generosity of their former pastor, felt the deprivation keenly, and one feast-day at the evening recreation of the Community a Sister ventured to voice her lamentation. "Ma Mère," she said, "is it not sad that the Bishop should have cut off our beautiful days of Exposition?" "What is still sadder," replied Mère St. Joseph, "is that a Sister of Notre Dame should allow herself to criticise the government of her Bishop. Instead of exclaiming against the loss of undeserved favours, it would be better to bow down with submission before God, and say, striking one's breast, 'Lord, I was not worthy.'"

There was a difficult time at Namur when Canon Renson was chaplain. This holy priest had grown old in the service of his Master, he was broken in health and had become a victim to scruples. Two or

three times over he would begin Mass, to repair some imaginary omission. In the confessional also and in the pulpit he was afflicted by the same trouble, and the Sisters naturally found the situation painful. Mère St. Joseph did all she could to relieve the strain, reminding them that all the difficulty arose simply from the excessive delicacy of conscience of a saintly priest.

Towards the ministers of temporal power also, Mère St. Joseph showed herself a loyal subject, so long as they did not infringe the rights of the King of kings : when, however, they showed a persecuting spirit towards the Catholic faith and Catholic education, she resisted them in a long-sustained encounter where, thanks to her steadfast courage and faith, she at last obtained the victory.

Those who saw her at prayer realised how strong was her faith. The boarders who saw her coming back from the altar rails learnt from her very aspect the depth of her adoration and were filled with the desire of drawing closer to our Lord.

Every day for many years Mère St. Joseph consecrated many hours to this holy exercise. Nor was this because she found great sensible consolation in it ; on the contrary, the notes she made upon her prayer in obedience to her confessor show that for the most part God led her by desert paths. Her devotion towards the Mystery of Faith found its practical expression in her zeal for everything connected with the altar. Already at Gézaincourt and at Bourdon she had been accustomed to perform with loving care the duties of sacristan. And during her religious life, while in other matters she leaned to indulgence rather than to severity, she showed herself punctilious in exacting the perfect fulfilment of the duties of this office. She was lavish in providing for the furnishing

of the church and the adornment of the altar for Divine service. She gladly gave material help to the secondary houses for this purpose, and inaugurated an altar society which devoted itself to work for poor churches, and which has developed since her time into a flourishing and active organisation.

The pomp and symbolism of religious ceremonial appealed to her love and to her faith alike. Under her direction the rubrics were exactly observed, and both Sisters and pupils gained an intelligent appreciation of the beauties of the liturgy. A devoted daughter of our Holy Mother the Church, she bequeathed to the Institute a devotion to prayer for the Church, obliging its members by rule to pray for Her needs, for the conversion of sinners and the propagation of the Faith, as well as for the necessities of the State. As a natural consequence of this largeness of view, one of the objects she had most at heart was provision for the education of priests. We have already seen that, before she understood that God was calling her to devote the fortune she inherited from her father to the establishment of the Institute, she cherished the idea of sacrificing it for the foundation of a Seminary. And she inspired the same devotion in her pupils, or suggested it to others who asked her advice as to the disposal of worldly goods.

Her chief work as Mother General was to crystallise the work of Mère Julie, her chief solicitude to preserve its primitive spirit. Knowing Julie, as she said, better than anyone in the world knew her, she claimed that, far from trying to introduce novelties, she had only committed to writing what the Foundress had established and exacted from the beginning of the Institute. And it is unnecessary to add that so loyal and devoted a co-operatrix was herself a living copy of the rule she drew up.

In her choice of secondary Superiors she was careful to be guided by their spiritual qualities, regarding them as the link between God and their Communities. She exhorted them on every occasion to preserve unity among their Sisters, and with each other, so that the Institute might be strong as a battalion standing shoulder to shoulder against the forces of evil and of the world.

Having chosen them with discrimination she reposed full confidence in them, and delegated to them a large measure of power, but at the same time she knew how to maintain a strong and independent attitude in their regard. "You see very clearly for a secondary Superior," she wrote to Sister Gudule when a difficult situation had arisen; "allow me to see from the point of view of Superior General. This is my duty, even though I have to expose myself to the criticism of my good Sisters." Again in the following year she wrote to Sister Marie of the Incarnation: "I shall act freely as seems best to me for the general good. I am not called Mother General for nothing." She expected indeed from the Superiors who were her chief support a breadth of view equal to her own. A Superior, newly installed at Dinant, had not yet caught the right note in this matter and pleaded the cause of her house in a tone which was too warm to denote disinterestedness. With great prudence and tact Mère St. Joseph wrote to her: "I note with pleasure that you interest yourself heartily in the general and particular good of your house and the Sisters who are confided to you. I approve too highly of this way of acting to derogate from it myself in the general good of the Institute and in the welfare of the individual houses which are likewise entrusted to me. I try in the sight of God to weigh both carefully. I shall do what I can for Dinant."

One of the houses being in difficulties she wrote to the Superior of another asking for prayers. "I beg of you to interest yourself in this," she said, "it is the spirit of the Institute not to confine oneself to one's own house. I know you have this spirit; that is why I speak to you at such length." And if she found a lack of this fraternal charity she did not let it pass. "I should like to send you my spectacles," she wrote on one occasion to a Superior, "so that you may get a wider outlook, for yours seems to be limited to your own house."

While she showed so much keenness in noting and so little hesitation in pointing out such fallings off from the ideal, she was at the same time quick and generous in recognising progress. "I am delighted," she wrote, "because I see that the Divine goodness is making real convents of our houses;" and again, "I see improvement in all our houses. . . . I see that every year they are blessed more and more."

Such improvement was not left to chance, it was the result of the zealous labours and the complete devotedness of the Superior General. "I am wholly yours, heart, strength, mind and soul," she wrote. And she was as good as her word. Even when she was over eighty she was ready to undertake long and inconvenient journeys to give to the secondary houses the encouragement of her presence, while at the Mother house her door was always open to her children.

She expected a high degree of devotedness from the secondary Superiors towards their subjects. "Do not let us be so much occupied with ourselves," she wrote to the Superior of Fleurus, "but much with the interests of our good God. He will never abandon us when we trust in Him. A courageous spirit will break through our self-love and timidity; after that we shall do some good."

To Sister Marie Thérèse she wrote: "When one is in charge of a Community, one should scarcely be occupied with oneself at all, and it is a ridiculous thing to be entangled with one's own temptations when one should be busy freeing others from theirs."

To the Superior of Thuin, who was dissatisfied with the progress of some of her Sisters, Mère St. Joseph, wiser and more experienced, writes as follows: "You are very good to be disappointed when the correction of faults is not immediately followed by the acquisition of virtues. How long a task that is, my dear, how long! Congratulate yourself when you see that the desire to accomplish it persists in spite of all the winds and storms which beat against it." And again, "One must have patience with others as with oneself. We do not do all we mean to do, alas!" The Sister to whom Mère St. Joseph wrote thus was Sister Gudule, a strong and virile character of whom she elsewhere wrote in the following terms of high praise: "Sister Gudule is intelligent, kind and virtuous, a person who is making daily progress in forming herself."

Now and again she found it necessary to restrain the over-ardent among her subjects. "Do not be too enterprising, I beg of you, nor too devout. Our works must all be accompanied with prudence if they are to please God."

Her care in selecting the Superiors and her assiduity in forming them were justified by the fervour of the Communities and the close union which existed between them and the Mother house. The excellent reputation which the Institute won for itself caused foundations to be asked for in every corner of the country. But, before allowing the Institute to extend too widely, the prudent Mother General was careful to establish it on a firm and solid foundation.

In accordance with the custom established by Mère Julie, she kept in close touch with all her spiritual children, and twice a year she received from each individual Sister an account of her work and her progress. While, however, each Sister had thus the opportunity of approaching her in regard to any necessity that might arise, Mère St. Joseph did not wish the Superior General to be regarded as anything more than a court of appeal in special cases; like a wise ruler she desired that the Sisters should be guided by the local Superiors in all ordinary circumstances, holding that it was inexpedient and indeed impossible for the Superior General to take upon herself the detailed regulation of the individual Sisters. On one occasion a Sister under severe temptation disburdened herself to the Superior General, who wrote to her to set her mind at rest. But the close of her letter showed that this procedure was regarded as being out of the ordinary. "Let no one know I have written to you," she wrote; "that would not be creditable to either one or other of us. You would be looked upon as a big baby, and I as a spoil-baby."

She did not, however, conceal her desire that the Sisters should be satisfied with her; she was always anxious that a perfect mutual confidence should exist between her and her subjects. Ready always to sympathise with them in their sufferings, she yet knew how to spur on the generous souls to heroism. "God is jealous and exacting," she wrote on one occasion; "He wants to be completely Master over you, perhaps that is the cause of your trouble." And again, "I cannot tell you how anxious I am to see you correspond to the designs of God over you. You see quite well that He wants all your heart; He afflicts you, He consoles you; He raises you up again, He urges you on. Take courage, then, and you will win

in the end the victory which cannot be won without struggles. Ought not Christ to have suffered and so to enter into His glory? And His members cannot enter into theirs by any other road."

While she thus spurred on the greater characters, she knew how to condescend to those of weaker calibre, and instead of discouraging them by exacting too much, she showed herself compassionate towards their weakness and appealed to their Superiors on their behalf. "There are some souls whose miseries and faults have never been attacked—all we can do is to try to prevent their growth and diminish them a little, and then we must try by our prayers to draw down upon them help and light from Heaven. It is our task to lend them support, it belongs to God only to increase their stature."

A Superior once wrote to Mère St. Joseph to ask her to remove a Sister who, though a capable mistress, was a troublesome subject. She even suggested that the Mother General should recall her to Namur and employ her there. "I cannot," replied Mère St. Joseph, "bring here all the unsatisfactory people. I will prepare for her a little salad with some vinegar and some oil—because both will be needed to make her swallow it." She was as good as her word, and the remedy proved efficacious. Regarding the novices as the future hope of the Institute, she took the utmost interest in their training. Every week it was her custom to give an instruction to the novices at the Mother house; she loved to see them at their work and at recreation; frequently she would make an unannounced visit to their study to examine their progress. With wonderful skill she substituted the spirit of the Institute for the spirit of the world, but, enemy as she was to any artificiality, she always recommended them to "remain themselves without

their faults." She had a gift for correcting them in such a way that she enlisted their efforts on her side. A novice who entered at Namur at the early age of sixteen found not unnaturally the silence of the novitiate extremely irksome, and was not infrequently found enjoying herself and entertaining her companions during times of silence. One day the Superior General arrived on the scene at the critical moment and the novice prepared herself to receive a severe reprimand. Instead, Mère St. Joseph gave her a motherly blessing, and said to her tenderly: "Little one, most people receive the faculty of speech, but how few are prudent in their speech, for want of thought. Go and say a 'Hail Mary' in the presence of Our Lady and ask her to make you understand her silence. She kept everything in her heart, the Gospel tells us."

From that day the restraint of silence was imposed from within instead of being submitted to as a yoke imposed from without, and the novice made rapid progress in its observance.

Another story is told of a novice who was consumed by an insatiable desire to write lengthy and frequent letters home. The novice mistress had already pointed out that this was out of order and might easily prove a snare to her recollection, if not indeed a stumbling-block to her perseverance. Her words did not carry conviction, however, and heedlessly enough the novice continued to indulge her out-pourings concerning her new way of life.

One morning Mère St. Joseph came to the novices' study. As she passed the novice of whom we speak, "My child," she said, "you must set your work aside; you have so much to write that I give you the whole day for your correspondence." The novice thanked her effusively, and, not perceiving the hint of irony, set

to work. By midday she had written more than ten pages, and the novice mistress referred her to Mère St. Joseph with her epistle. The Mother General took the ten pages out of the envelope and counted them very deliberately, then, "That is not enough, dear child," she said, "you must go on this afternoon." Then at last the lesson went home and the novice, crimson with mortification, begged to be spared any further humiliation. Seeing her distress, Mère St. Joseph consoled her, and in a few kind words pointed out that while a Sister of Notre Dame ought to preserve intact all her legitimate affections, she should be on her guard against making them a pretext for merely selfish indulgence.

Similar incidents abound in the reminiscences of Mère St. Joseph's contemporaries, and all alike bear witness to the gentleness, wisdom and firmness of the Co-foundress in her guidance of the young Sisters. She understood their aspirations and loved their enthusiasm, making use of them to lead them step by step to voluntary and complete self-renunciation. In order that their religious training might be thorough, she would keep them as long as possible in the novitiate. "When one of them is missing," she would say, "I am like a hen that has lost her chickens." She warned the Superiors that she would always refuse to send them Sisters whose formation was incomplete, and when under the pressure of extreme necessity she was forced to give up some of her subjects, she carefully chose those who gave evidence of a certain maturity, kept in touch with them while they were absent from the Mother house, and recalled them to it as soon as the holidays set them free from their class-work.

The portrait of any religious Superior would be incomplete if it did not describe how she carried out the most unpleasant of her duties, that of correction.

In this respect Mère St. Joseph was regarded by some as leaning too much towards gentleness. The criticism was probably due to the contrast between her methods and those of Mère Julie, whose action had been more trenchant and vigorous, but it ignores the fact that the methods which guarantee success must be adapted to the character of the ruler.

The long-suffering and forbearance of Mère St. Joseph did not detract from her firmness—it was indeed from those very virtues that her firmness derived its enduring quality. She considered that the duty of correction was that which made the greatest claim on the devotedness of the Superior, and like a skilful physician she made a careful study of the temperaments of her subjects, and adapted her remedies to them.

At the Chapter meetings she would reprimand with severity any exterior breaches of rule, any failure in charity or the religious virtues, any lack of respect towards the Blessed Sacrament.

Following the example of Mère Julie, she looked for prompt and unquestioning obedience, and expected that changes of house should be accomplished “gaily, according to the spirit of a religious vocation.” It happened that a certain Sister Ursula once wrote to her declaring she was ill suited for the work which had been assigned to her, and asking that it might be changed. Not only was she not released from her post, but she received a letter from Mère St. Joseph in the following terms: “You are in the place where God wants you, for the present at least, for we ought not to make any plans for the future. We belong to Our Lord, it is for Him to place and displace us as He pleases, to-day here, to-morrow there, the day after to-morrow somewhere else. It is the same with regard to our office, sometimes low, sometimes high. . . .

Nor is this always a small matter ; we must be very dead to our own will to be submissive in everything."

Not in every case, however, did Mère St. Joseph demand so high a degree of submission, for she was too experienced in the ways of human nature not to know that right too rigid easily hardens into wrong. A somewhat austere Superior even made her condescension in regard to one Sister a subject for criticism. With characteristic humility the Superior General replied : " I know one should not always consult so closely the tastes of the Sisters, but I also know that there are few people of such high virtue as to be able to act well for long in the face of strong natural repugnance."

At the close of a retreat she wrote to Jumet announcing to those who had remained there the return of the Sisters who had been to Namur. " We were much pleased to see our dear Sisters and we shall part again to-morrow with submission to the orders of our Great Master. Since it is for His service we must not complain of all the changes and sacrifices which are involved. I am keeping two Sisters and sending you two others. How beautiful and how truly great it is to cling to nothing and to go willingly wherever God calls us. That is our vocation ; and as soon as one begins to feel oneself comfortably settled anywhere according to nature, one must prepare to go elsewhere, because it often happens that God who loves us arranges it so."

When a heavy charge had brought difficulties to any of the Sisters in spite of their goodwill, Mère St. Joseph had the gift of stirring up their courage to face the situation with fortitude and even with joy. A Sister sent to a secondary house to take the place of another who had been much liked and highly appreciated, passed a year full of humiliations in consequence.

During the holidays Mère St. Joseph, who had kept in touch with her, invited her to Namur for the retreat, which she made extremely well. At its close she asked her, "My child, would you, to please the Heart of Jesus, and to make Him loved, be brave enough to return to the place where you have suffered so much?"

The Sister, full of fervour and good purpose, replied that she would consider it a sacrifice to go anywhere else. Mère St. Joseph was visibly pleased, and drawing her nearer to her and blessing her tenderly: "You are a true child of our Mère Julie," she said, "and I assure you in the name of Our Lord that the year will be blessed by the solid good you will do at N—— and by the consolations you will find there. Courage! God is pleased with you, and your old Mother feels quite young again because she reckons such generous hearts among her children."

Mère St. Joseph did not, naturally, find all her subjects capable of such heroic submission. There was a Sister whose difficult character made her an impossible subject and an equally impossible colleague. She had been transferred from house to house without any visible amelioration of her disposition, and the Mother General, having exhausted every milder means of dealing with her, addressed to her a severe letter. "Who are you then?" she wrote; "what have you to recommend you? Where did you get this haughty spirit? Will you allow us to move you from one house to another to find one where there will be no stumbling-block? Did you not come into religion to sanctify yourself by humility, obedience and all the virtues?" But when the delinquent seemed to be shocked into recognition of her fault the habitual note of kindness makes itself once more heard. "I shall pray much for you, and shall get many good souls

to pray, without saying for whom, for I want to spare your reputation. I hope soon to hear better news which will renew the affection I have always had for you, and which I still bear you. . . ."

The tenderness of Mère St. Joseph won back this soul which had begun to stray, and in connection with the incident it may be mentioned that her pardon was always complete; she never kept a fault in mind or referred to it again; never extinguished the smoking flax or broke the bruised reed. And so her corrections were efficacious, because her subjects realised that they proceeded not from an impulse of anger, but from the keen desire she had for their perfection. The Superiors were no more exempt from reprimand than the simple Sisters: indeed their position rather conferred on them the privilege of hearing the truth without any beating about the bush.

In one town in Belgium there were difficulties with the civic authorities, who were somewhat niggardly in their dealings with the convent, and the Superior, in her desire to maintain peace, showed herself compromising even to weakness. To her Mère St. Joseph wrote: "I will not allow you to burden yourself with heavy indemnities nor even to give the exorbitant price which is being asked, and since it is I who stand security for you, I think my words ought to have some weight: I will not recognise any other terms than those I have here laid down."

A matter of principle alone could have inspired such a protest; for the question of material gain, or the fear of necessary, even if heavy, expenditure was not a motive which weighed with Mère St. Joseph. On more than one occasion she gives herself this testimony. "Thanks be to God, I am not guided by temporal interest."

Nor did her acts belie her assertion. At Fleurus a pious lady had bequeathed to the Sisters a building for their poor school. The legacy excited jealousy, and it happened that a slight ambiguity in the text of the will gave opportunity for a reclamation on the part of those concerned. An action at law was proposed, but Mère St. Joseph refused permission. "We are not sufficiently interested to trouble ourselves over trifles of that sort," she concluded with dignity.

That the decision was not actuated by pride was proved by the fact that about the same time at Zèle a similar gift had been accepted by the Superior General, but in this case the legacy had been left unconditionally.

Mère St. Joseph was careful to teach her Sisters that even at the cost of considerable sacrifice they should avoid accepting any obligations at the hands of seculars which might interfere with their freedom as religious. While, for instance, she accepted the generosity of Mlle. de Biolley towards the foundation at Verviers, she had refused, some years earlier, the offers of a would-be benefactress who wished to extend her patronage to the religious life of the Sisters as well as to their material support. She had even in the early days of the Institute refused to affiliate to it a Community of excellent reputation and sound financial standing, giving as her reason, a reason approved by the Bishop: "They are probably holier than we are, their talents and merits are much superior to ours, but they will never make their own our spirit of simplicity."

Perhaps the strongest proof of her disinterestedness, however, was the zeal with which she furthered the project of Father Wolff, sparing neither expense nor trouble in forming the postulants whom he destined for the initiation of his work in Holland, and that, too, at the time when the resources of the Institute were

precarious, and when a merely human prudence might speciously have suggested a less noble and less generous line of action.

A similar breadth of outlook guided Mère St. Joseph in regard to the vocations of those who had been pupils of the Sisters. She was never the first to broach the subject to them, and in some cases she subjected them to the test of prolonged waiting. She expressly forbade the mistresses to attempt to influence such decisions, and frequently refused to admit pupils who wished to pass immediately from the boarding school to the novitiate without a period of probation in the world, lest their decision should not be maturely weighed. She was as ready to help those who showed a desire to join other orders as those who wished to become members of her own Institute, and would do all she could to facilitate their relations with the order towards which they were attracted—Carmelites, Poor Clares, Sisters of Charity, Benedictines, and many others reckoned among their subjects former pupils of Notre Dame whose vocations had been fostered by its Co-foundress.

To would-be postulants of rank or wealth Mère St. Joseph was careful to point out that they were receiving, not conferring, a favour by entering a religious institute, and that a religious vocation was of more surpassing value than any worldly honour, while if they came from an environment in which they were likely to have inherited certain social prejudices, she laid stress upon the perfect equality which is observed in all Communities of Notre Dame. With a judgment so keen and with methods so direct and so simple, it was rare that any vocation which had been examined and approved by her was found in the sequel to be mistaken.

We have studied Mère St. Joseph as a religious subject in her relation to Mère Julie, and as a Superior in relation to her subjects; we have noted too how ably as Mother General she administered the growing Institute, impressing upon it the form she knew its Foundress intended it to bear, safeguarding its aims in all conflicts with the civil government and exercising a keen vigilance over its interior spirit.

Briefly, now, let us examine her ideals as an educator, since her influence in this direction was, after the personality of Mère Julie, the most important formative element in the educational institute of Notre Dame.

The suggestion has been made that Mère St. Joseph did not like children, and the evidence adduced in its support is taken from certain phrases in her writings. Thus, in an account of her meditation the phrase occurs, "There is nothing I dread so much as a troop of children." And three years later, when one would have expected that this dread would have been at least modified by experience, she wrote to Mère Julie: "It is contrary to all my natural tastes to deal with children who have not come to the use of reason, whom one cannot set to work at anything nor keep quiet." Yet her spirit of obedience triumphed over her diffidence. "Since you spoke," she writes to Mère Julie, "I go twice a week into Sister Xavier's class. I give a rigmarole of half an hour or three-quarters, of which I do not believe they understand very much. I still find it somewhat distressing, and it seems to me I have not the gift of teaching a large group of children."

In reply Julie wrote with her usual perspicacity of judgment: "You think your pupils do not understand very much. But God understands, and He sees that if you could do better, you would. It is a little

distressing for you ; that I can well imagine ; but it is also very meritorious ; that I can answer for. I know quite well the kind of work for which you have a special gift. God's moment will come. Let us adore His Divine delays." The truth of the matter would seem to be, not that Mère St. Joseph did not like children, but that she was inexperienced in dealing with them in large numbers, a state of things quite natural in one who had been brought up almost exclusively in the society of her elders, and which is quite compatible with an intense love of children.

Moreover, the fact that even after she became Superior of the Mother house at Namur she retained for many years the charge of preparing the children for their First Communion, would seem to indicate that she found the means of getting into touch with the minds of the young.

But the organisation of the Institute as it developed provided her with an even more potent opportunity of contributing to the supremely apostolic work of Christian teaching.

When the survivors of the Revolution looked round and saw the havoc it had brought upon France, they recognised that the first need in the work of reconstruction of their country was the reorganisation of education. The young generation was growing up in ignorance and it was imperative to prepare a body of teachers. For this task Mère St. Joseph was admirably competent. Her own education had been wide and thorough ; she was indeed for years the only member of the Institute who was adequately equipped for the work of secular instruction. And as long as she lived she devoted herself personally to the organisation of the teaching work of the Institute. She prepared those who were destined to teach, not merely by

instilling into them the reverence for the child which is a necessary spirit of the educator, but by supervising their own studies and preparing courses of instruction to be followed throughout the Institute. With an initiative and an untiring energy which are beyond all praise, she organised teaching conferences and discussions in the various convents and stirred up emulation by examinations and competitions of every kind.

To estimate rightly the magnitude of her task we must be on our guard against measuring it from the standpoint of the present, which is the legatee of the labours in this direction of a whole century and more.

The work accomplished by Mère St. Joseph with the scanty materials to hand, the unremitting assiduity with which she laboured to train a body of competent teachers to plough the barren fields, passed the bounds of heroism. She foresaw that an ever-growing perfection of intellectual equipment would be exacted from the teacher as time went on, and she foresaw too that unless the Catholic body could prove its competence in secular learning, it would lack the means to accomplish its chief aim, that of bringing up a generation thoroughly imbued with Christian principles and thoroughly devoted to the practice of its faith. "As there is little education at present which is truly Christian in character," she wrote, "it is important that our Sisters should be thoroughly well instructed." "Our Institute," she says on another occasion, "can only be sustained by persons who are virtuous, sufficiently learned, and worthy; we shall be soon set aside if our pupils are not found to be thoroughly taught. . . . Excite the zeal of the Sisters for the studies which are indispensable for us. What could we do with ignorant people? Let the

teaching Sisters try to understand that it is one of their chief duties to apply themselves to study and to put their heart into it. Do not speak to me of people who are asleep. But I hope the love and fear of God will awaken them."

Again in a letter to the Sisters of Dinant she wrote: "I beg the Sisters and urge and command them to make every effort, and to profit by every moment to study what they need to know."

Yet in this matter, as in others, Mère St. Joseph realised that the personality of a teacher is more influential than her competence in secular studies, and not even under the stress of a necessity which must have been ever pressing would she sacrifice the future to the present. To the courses of secular studies organised at the Mother house she admitted none but Sisters thoroughly grounded in Christian doctrine and imbued with the spirit of their rule, while any who showed signs of self-sufficiency or worldliness were excluded, no matter how brilliant were their intellectual attainments. "The slightest tinge of pride," said the wise Superior, "will render sterile any superficial success. Without the spirit of God we shall accomplish merely exterior work, and our pupils will never become Christians of practical and intelligent faith."

From the mistresses she expected a spirit of union with their Superiors. "The efficiency of a Community gathered together for a common end is best secured by unity, and this can only be attained by mutual concessions. Nor need such concessions involve any prejudicial sacrifice of individuality. The centre of any Community is its Superior, and the work achieved will be at its maximum when each subject makes the purpose of the Superior her own and

uses her whole energy and initiative to carry it into effect."

In her exhortations to the mistresses Mère St. Joseph laid stress on the necessity of self-sacrifice and devotedness. "A Sister of Notre Dame ought to spend herself, to tire herself out. . . . To be afraid to wear oneself out in teaching and to die at forty is a sign of cowardice in the service of God. That must not be met with among us; Mère Julie will not tolerate weaklings among her children."

But this self-sacrifice must not be sour or austere, it must be loving, generous and cheerful, and the manner of the teacher should be characterised by that calm which is the outcome of self-discipline. "If you are calm and mistresses of yourselves," she would say, "you will easily control others."

A Superior, yielding to the importunity of a Sister who had not gained the patience which is perhaps the virtue most indispensable to the teacher, once asked permission to dismiss a difficult pupil. The answer was prompt. "Truly I am surprised," wrote the Co-foundress, "that you ask me if you should get rid of a tiresome little boarder! I have always thought that when they are naughty one should try to make them good and only dismiss them after all possible means have been vainly tried to make them better; unless indeed they have vicious habits which are likely to upset a whole class. Otherwise one must usually make up one's mind to bear with them."

Mère St. Joseph's lofty conception of the vocation of the teacher was the complement of her respect for the soul of the child. "I implore you," she would say, "to realise the sublimity of our vocation. . . . Every soul, no matter how small, or how unattractive its envelope, is the image of God."

A novice, inexperienced in managing a class, was one day sent into the poor school to supply the place of an absent mistress. The first day found her, as one might expect, overwhelmed and helpless. She felt that her authority was utterly compromised, and betook herself to Mère St. Joseph to implore her to spare her the torment of a second day among that troop of "little brats." "I saw at once by her expression that my words had displeased her," writes the novice, who herself gives the account of the incident. "Did you go to Holy Communion this morning?" she asked me simply. "Did you consider that in order to come to you, Our dear Lord accepted the innumerable profanations with which He would be insulted all through the ages? And you complain of a few difficulties which you have to meet with in order to come in contact with the souls of poor children redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ."

The novice, put to shame, took up her task again with courage, and the next day she returned to her Superior with a different story and ready to praise the docility of the children. Mère St. Joseph was glad to note the change of attitude, but added: "The epithet which you cast at these poor children yesterday was the outburst of wounded self-love; the love of Jesus Christ inspires a mistress with more dignity. Remember all your life that without respect for the child one can neither understand nor fulfil the real end of education."

In addressing the Sisters before the reopening of school Mère St. Joseph would remind them of their obligations both as teachers and as religious. She urged them to cultivate that wise maternal love for their pupils which is characterised by its universality

and expresses itself by sacrifice. "Love the little children who will come to you to-morrow to ask for the bread of true doctrine, love them everyone; whether they are poor or rich their souls are the price of the Blood of Our Lord. Do not let them be lost by your lack of union with God or of the spirit of sacrifice."

She warned them too against the counterfeit of this disinterested tenderness—against that unwholesome affection which is but self-seeking in disguise.

To a young Sister who had been appointed to be head mistress of a boarding-school she wrote: "Be on your guard against the flattery and the friendship of the children. You are not yet steadfastly rooted in charity, and I tremble lest you should attach them to you in a human fashion which would prevent your having the blessing of God upon you, and which would give rise to jealousies and endless miseries. What does it matter whether they love you or not provided they love God?"

The poorer children were the objects of her special predilection; when she heard their sabots clattering in the court as they assembled for their classes she would go out and inquire whether they had all breakfasted, and when she visited the poor school she sought out instinctively the most unhappy-looking and did not rest until she had done something to alleviate their suffering.

The boarders appreciated her care for their welfare and responded to it by enthusiastic affection and unquestioning trust. In 1832 the cholera scourge made its appearance in Belgium, and in many of the towns where the Sisters were established the death-roll became alarmingly high. One morning the tidings brought by the postman to several of the children had

caused something of a panic in the boarding school at Namur. "Do not be afraid," said Mère St. Joseph to the assembled children. "The cholera does not visit either the Sisters of Notre Dame or their pupils, because the Heart of Jesus is their protection." Her assurance was justified by the event, for not one Sister or one pupil in any house of the Institute was stricken down by the malady, and this almost miraculous preservation was traditionally attributed less to the hygienic measures of precaution adopted and ordered by the Superior General than to the moral force of her trust in God.

Such was Mère St. Joseph after the long discipline of years had matured her virtue. Her life story illustrates the apparent paradox that the fullest and most fruitful self-development is the outcome of complete self-effacement. Sacrifice of worldly position, of material possessions and of the tenderest family ties, these were but preludes to that more intimate sacrifice she made of her will, and even, it might seem to a superficial observer, of personal initiative when she vowed submission to the lowly peasant of Cuvilly. It would be easy, now that the lapse of more than a century has crowned with the aureole of the Blessed the brows of Julie Billiart, to under-estimate the magnitude of that act of renunciation. For Frances made it in the twilight, before the dawn had dispelled the mists of morning, or given presage of the glories of the noonday, made it by the light of that clear, cold starshine of Faith which led her as it led the Magi of old, by desert ways perhaps, yet infallibly, to the manifestation of Christ.

It is a gracious figure that presents itself for our contemplation now when it is drawing towards evening and the sheaves of her life-work are ready to be

garnered. Noble in birth, she was nobler still in her renunciation of the honours of birth ; noble in government, yet still nobler in voluntary submission ; noble in exterior achievement, yet noblest of all in her simple fidelity to the manifest Will of God.

CHAPTER XX

LAST YEARS AND DEATH

FOR the two years of life which remained to her after the trial of 1835, Mère St. Joseph devoted herself to strengthening the bonds of union which attached the Sisters of the Institute to each other and to the Mother house.

On mid-Lent Sunday 1836 Mgr. Dehesselle was consecrated Bishop of Namur in succession to Mgr. Barrett, who had died the previous year. The new Bishop was no stranger to Namur, in which city, as a seminarian, he had pursued his studies in philosophy, still less was he strange to the Sisters of Notre Dame, whom he had known already when he was a curate at Liège. Sister Ignace testified that he showed towards the work of Mère Julie as much solicitude as did Saint Francis de Sales for the Order of the Visitation, and his kindness and goodwill were the greatest comfort granted to the last years of Mère St. Joseph.

In April of this year the Mother General set out upon what was to be her last visitation of the houses in Hainault. Leaving the care of the Institute in the hands of her assistant, Sister Ignace, she took as her companion Sister M. Thérèse and set out for Thuin. The Sisters of the Community found her much aged and feared they should see her no more. Mère St. Joseph guessed what was in their minds and exhorted them to put their trust in God, who would always raise

up for them Superiors capable of facing the difficulties which should arise. Then seeing a few tears being furtively wiped away, she ended smilingly, "Let none of my dear children show herself a weakling." But it was evident that she too was overcome, and she hastily took her place in the waiting carriage. The same impression was made upon the Sisters of the other houses she visited, and all rejoiced when the fatiguing journey was over.

The last remaining witness of the arrival of the Sisters in Namur from Amiens died in May in the person of M. Minsart.

This holy priest had been chosen as confessor to the Sisters by Mgr. Pisani when he was a simple curate in the parish of St. Jean. He was full of zeal, the heart and soul of every good work in the town, and his devotedness to the Sisters did not limit itself to the spiritual help he was so well qualified to give them, but appeared in his wise counsel with regard to business affairs and in his indefatigable energy on their behalf.

From 1807 to 1836 he had remained the staunch supporter and loyal friend of the Institute, and the personal gratitude of Mère St. Joseph to him knew no bounds.

The journey through Hainault had fatigued Mère St. Joseph more than she was willing to confess. When in the summer her nephew paid her his annual visit, he was struck by the change a year had made in her appearance. Though she strove heroically to follow the Community exercises, she was obliged as time went on to entrust more and more of the general administration of the Institute to her assistant, together with the spiritual direction of the Community.

During the autumn the trustees of the Hospices of Namur, supported by the Bishop, approached Mère



Convent of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Bastogne.

St. Joseph with the design of obtaining some Sisters to undertake the direction of the large Hospice d'Harscamp, where there were some two hundred and forty old people of both sexes to be cared for.

The widow of the Count d'Harscamp, dying childless in 1806, had left, among other charitable bequests, a large sum of money to be expended in founding a Hospice for persons in reduced circumstances, and by the terms of her will the institution was to be directed by religious. Up to 1836 all attempts on the part of her executors to carry out this provision of the testator had failed, and in May of that year, in view of the success they had achieved at the Hospices of St. Gilles and St. Jacques, it was decided to apply to the Sisters of Notre Dame.

The desire of the Bishop induced Mère St. Joseph to consent, and in October three Sisters took up the work, which remained in the hands of the Institute until 1869.

While these arrangements were being made, negotiations were reopened in regard to a long-desired foundation at Bastogne, a little town which ambitiously styles itself the Paris of the Ardennes. Every convent in the Institute made its contribution of house or church furniture to assist the new mission, which was, indeed, destined to an important future.

The first railway in Belgium had been opened about eighteen months before, but as it did not pass through Namur, the six Sisters who set out for the Ardennes on November 3 took the more picturesque, old-fashioned diligence. Dinant was the first posting-place, and here they waited a whole day for the vehicle which was to convey them to their destination. They were, of course, received with open arms at the Dinant convent, Benediction was given to bring a blessing on the expedition, and an appropriate little discourse addressed to the missionaries by the Dean, M. Roubaud.

At the peep of dawn a private carriage barely capable of accommodating six people appeared at the convent gates, and into this the Sisters packed themselves and their innumerable bundles. The roads were bad, and after a while the passengers were obliged to get out to relieve the horses.

The journey was made in excellent spirits nevertheless. Sister Ignace was the life and soul of the party, cheering them by her bright manner and conversation. They whiled away the day alternately praying, singing hymns and litanies and conversing gaily like light-hearted pilgrims making their way to some shrine.

Twilight fell, and with the coming on of darkness it began to pour in torrents, turning the roads into muddy watercourses. The Sisters sought the shelter of their carriage, but even this was not proof against the penetrating rain, which made its way through a chink of the hood and gradually drenched them.

Somehow or another they reached the forest of St. Hubert. The horses were exhausted. The coachman, and little wonder, was in a thoroughly bad temper, and declared he would go no further. The outlines of an inn were just visible through the darkness, and there he insisted on halting for a rest.

The Sisters refused to get out. The inn might be safe or it might not—no one could tell—and the carriage contained all the worldly goods of the new little household—they could not dream of abandoning it. The driver unharnessed his horses and disappeared into the black night. It was only six o'clock, but there was no one about and it was impossible to distinguish any object more than a yard or two away.

Somebody remembered a tiny lantern which was among the luggage, and after much groping they succeeded in extricating it.

The coachman was better than his word. He

reappeared after about four hours with fresh horses, coupled them up to the carriage and took the road again.

The next morning at three the party made its entry into Bastogne, to find the house locked and empty. After some time they succeeded in arousing a kindly neighbour, who procured the key and let the frozen travellers into their new home. They found their beds ready, but had to improvise curtains by pinning strips of calico across the windows.

When they awoke from their well-earned slumbers and made the tour of their habitation, further surprises awaited them. The house was spotlessly clean, but of furniture, with the exception of the beds they had slept in, there was not a trace. Objects of immediate necessity had to be borrowed, and every meeting of the Community brought to light some of the talent for doing merrily without which is so invaluable an equipment of the pioneer.

Sister Ignace remained with them a fortnight, and thanks to the energy of the Sisters and the co-operation of the friends they made among the townspeople they were ready to open school on November 15. All the parents who came to present their children as scholars made presents in kind, so that the convent larder was supplied for some time.

From the first the poor school was filled, and the number of day scholars was twice as many as were expected, so that a second room had to be provided for them. Six resident pupils formed the nucleus of the existing boarding school.

The success of Bastogne aroused a spirit of emulation in several other small towns, requests for foundations flowed in, and, once more under the guidance of Sister Ignace, a house was opened at Philippeville in 1837.

Improvements in existing undertakings kept pace

with the inauguration of new ones. Ever since 1823, when the Sisters had taken over the Hospice of St. Gilles, they had been agitating to secure a separate establishment for the orphans. The convent of the Carmelite friars in Namur came opportunely into the market, but the property was valued at 80,000 francs and funds were lacking.

The Sisters were not discouraged, but made an effort to obtain from the charity of the public what they could not get from the Trustees of the Hospice. A subscription list, opened in 1832, was headed by Queen Marie Louise, and many generous persons followed her example, but the sum in hand still fell far short of the requirements.

The Sisters in charge of St. Gilles then begged Mère St. Joseph to allow them to beg from door to door. She did so, but even after many months they had only collected in all 11,000 francs. Touched by their devotion to their orphan charges, the Vicar Capitular of the diocese disposed in their favour of a sum given to him for good works, and made the amount up to 40,000 francs. And then the Trustees voted unanimously the remaining half. Some time was spent in the necessary formalities, and the orphans were at last installed in their new and commodious quarters in October 1837.

Mère St. Joseph had had a severe attack of her old enemy rheumatism. She recovered somewhat during the summer, but a second seizure prostrated her in October. She suffered acutely, yet she was always serene and even gay, so that those who surrounded her were extremely edified by her virtue.

The entire Institute tried by prayer to do violence to Heaven to obtain her cure. "If God were to listen to you," she said one day to some of the Sisters, "I should still be here a hundred years hence. Pray



Orphanage, rue St. Jacques, Namur.

rather that I may have the desire of a child to go to its Heavenly Father, or that of an exile to return home."

During these trying months Sister Ignace devoted herself on the one hand to soothing the last days of her beloved Mother, and on the other to consoling the Sisters, who saw the shadow of Death looming ever nearer and nearer. She invited the local Superiors in turn to Namur to give them each the consolation of seeing the Mother General whom they loved so much, and she sent out constant and regular bulletins to all the houses.

Mère St. Joseph would often surprise the Sisters by the way in which she would rise superior to her growing weakness. On the Feast of the Epiphany she made a supreme effort and came down for a few minutes to the refectory. About the same time the mother of two Flemish novices came to visit her daughters. The Superior Assistant greeted her cordially, but there was just one thing necessary to make the joy of her visit complete. She had not seen the Superior General. Her children explained that Mère St. Joseph never left her own room on account of her weak and suffering state. The good lady was still unsatisfied, "I have come such a long way," she said, "and now am I to go away without seeing the Mother of my children?"

The novices looked at one another. It was hard to disappoint their mother, and one of them, knowing how gracious Mère St. Joseph always was, ventured to knock at her door, and returned with a radiant face, having successfully accomplished her mission. The Mother General welcomed the excellent mother who had generously given two of her children to God, thanking her for the sacrifice she had made, and speaking such encouraging words that the mother was carried away by her admiration. "Now I shall go

home perfectly happy," she said to her children, "because I am leaving you in good hands. Your Mother General is a Saint." All who came in contact with Mère St. Joseph indeed were impressed by the same sense of her high virtue.

In the middle of January she took to her bed, from which she was never to rise. The room in which she lay adjoined the chapel, and a little door opening into the sanctuary allowed her to follow the Holy Sacrifice and to fix her eyes lovingly upon the Tabernacle at other times during the day. Every morning she had the privilege of receiving Holy Communion at six o'clock, and her eager longing for this moment, and deep recollection after it, bore witness to her intense and vivid faith.

She spoke little, during her last illness, of the Institute or of its future. Like Mère Julie, she recognised that she had been but an instrument in the hand of God and acknowledged herself an unprofitable servant. Once only she put a question to assure herself that she had made over everything she had possessed to the Congregation, and that there was nothing which could be called her own. "I will live in poverty," she had written at the outset of her religious life. "I will learn to love the poverty of Jesus Christ, so that I may deserve to become the servant and mother of the poor." The faithful observance of this resolution made death easy and consoling for her, as for all who follow the same road.

In the morning of February 2, 1838, the Bishop came to give her the Last Sacraments. At this solemn moment Mère St. Joseph was exactly what she had always been, great, simple, unaffected. She renewed her vows in accents of fervent love, asked forgiveness of her Sisters for the bad example she might have given or the pain she might have caused them, and



Tomb of the Foundresses at the Mother House, Namur.

begged them to obtain for her by their prayers the grace of a holy death. The Sisters who surrounded her bed could not restrain their emotion, the atmosphere was peaceful, and heaven seemed very near. In the afternoon Mère St. Joseph spoke to the Sisters gathered round her for the last time. "My dear children," she said, "I thank you all for the affection you have borne me. Love and respect your Superiors. Remain ever united in heart and soul. Keep your rules and God will bless each in proportion to her fidelity." It was her last instruction. As the sad little procession of her spiritual children filed past her bed she recognised each and smiled her good-bye. A wave of intense feeling crossed her face as the oldest Sisters, who had borne with her the burden and the heats of the day, passed out of the room and out of her life. Her tears flowed for a while, and then her countenance regained its calm.

She lingered yet a few days, but only her murmured prayers broke the silence of those precious moments. On February 8 Mgr. Dehesselle gave her the last Blessing. "Reverend Mother," he said, "you want to go to God as soon as possible, do you not?" "Monseigneur," she replied, "I only want the accomplishment of His holy and adorable Will."

She received Holy Viaticum next morning, and towards eight o'clock, her eyes fixed on the crucifix, she entered into her agony. Sister Ignace, kneeling beside her bed, helped her to hold the blest candle in her powerless hands, while the chaplain recited the consoling prayers for the Agonising. By the movement of her lips it could be seen that Mère St. Joseph was assisting in the responses.

A look of pain contracted her features for an instant—it passed, and was followed by an expression of perfect peace. The chaplain began the Psalm, "I

rejoiced in the things that were said to me, we shall go into the House of the Lord ; ” then a radiant smile lit up her face, and without effort or struggle her spirit returned to God who gave it.

In such a death, after such a life, there is no sting. The *De Profundis*, the cry of unquenchable hope, was said, and upon every heart fell a sense of calm and consolation.

The following afternoon the body was borne to the Chapel of St. Joseph, where the absolutions were pronounced by the assistant priests. Afterwards the little procession returned to the novitiate, chanting the *In Paradisum* and the *Benedictus*, and the coffin remained there to await the hour of burial.

This derogation from the ordinary custom aroused surprise, and a certain air of mystery brooded over the house. Some of those who speculated upon a possible explanation attributed it to the heavy fall of snow which had taken place, and which, lying on the ground to the depth of three feet, rendered access to the cemetery difficult.

But they would have understood better if they had seen about eleven o'clock that night another silent procession wending its way from the novitiate to the little oratory in the garden where the body of the Co-foundress was laid side by side with that of the Mother she had so dearly loved.

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